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# CRAIG'S WIFE

## By George Kelly

THE SHOW-OFF — A PLAY

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CRAIG'S WIFE — A DRAMA

# CRAIG'S WIFE

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*A Drama*

BY

GEORGE KELLY

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Craig's wife;
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DAMAGE

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1926

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DEDICATED TO ROSALIE STEWART

"People who live to themselves, Harriet, are generally left to themselves."

MISS AUSTEN.

"Craig's Wife", by George Kelly, was presented by Rosalie Stewart at the Morosco Theatre, New York City, on the night of Monday, October 12, 1925, with the following cast:

| | |
|---|---|
| Miss Austen | *Anne Sutherland* |
| Mrs. Harold | *Josephine Williams* |
| Mazie | *Mary Gildea* |
| Mrs. Craig | *Chrystal Herne* |
| Ethel Landreth | *Eleanor Mish* |
| Walter Craig | *Charles Trowbridge* |
| Mrs. Frazier | *Josephine Hull* |
| Billy Birkmire | *Arling Alcine* |
| Joseph Catelle | *Arthur Shaw* |
| Harry | *J. A. Curtis* |
| Eugene Fredericks | *Nelan Jaap* |

Play staged by the Author

# CRAIG'S WIFE

## ACT I

*The entire action of the play transpires between five-thirty in the evening and nine o'clock the following morning, in the living room in the home of Mr. Walter Craig. This room, like all the other rooms in the house, reflects the very excellent taste and fanatical orderliness of its mistress. It is a kind of frozen grandeur, in dark, highly polished wood — strewn with gorgeous, gold-colored rugs and draped in rich brocaded satins. The piano scarf and the scarf on the oblong center table are canary-colored, and the draperies on the bay window at the left, and on the curving window on the stair landing at the back, are dark green. This curving window has a beautiful built-in window seat, with lovely cushions, and there is another built-in seat at the right of the staircase, from which the balustrade curves upwards. On the right, at the back, there is a wide door hung with brown velvet portières; and the rest of the room at the right is taken up with an ornamental mantelpiece, fancy mirror and fireplace. In front of this fireplace there is a beautiful high-backed chair. There is another big chair at the left of the center table, a small fancy chair beside the piano, and a chair at either side of the room, forward. There are two fancy benches, one immediately above the center table, and one in front of the center table. There is sufficient room between the table and this forward bench to permit of the business of passing between them. Up at the left there is a glass vestibule, one*

*door of which opens into the room and the other out on to the front porch. As Mrs. Craig enters, she appears to have been dressed for this particular room. She wears an extremely fashionable fawn-colored ensemble suit, brown slippers and stockings, and a small, dark brown velvet toque. She carries a brown leather pocket-book and a brown silk umbrella.*

*Miss Austen hurries down the stairs and out through the portières at the right. Mrs. Harold comes in through the door up at the left, carrying the evening newspaper and some tabourette doilies, and moves down towards the center table.*

MRS. HAROLD (*stopping halfway to the table and peering out after Miss Austen*)

Is there something you wanted, Miss Austen?

MISS AUSTEN

No, thanks, dear, I'm just looking for that pattern that I sent for the other day: I wanted to show it to Mrs. Frazier.

MRS. HAROLD

Lift up the lid of that worktable there, Miss Austen; I think I saw a pattern of some kind in there this morning.

[*Continuing to the table and putting down the newspaper and doilies.*

MISS AUSTEN

Yes, here it is, I have it. (*There is a sound from the right*) I knew I left it right here somewhere.

[*She hurries in through the portières and up the stairs.*

MRS. HAROLD (*moving up to the door at the left*)

I gave those roses she brought to Mazie to put in some water.

MISS AUSTEN
Oh, did you — thanks ever so much.

MRS. HAROLD
She's gettin' a vase for them.

MISS AUSTEN
They're lovely, aren't they?

MRS. HAROLD
Yes, they're handsome.

[*She goes out on to the porch again, and Mazie comes in through the portières, carrying a vase of pink roses, which she puts on the upper corner of the small grand piano at the left.*

MAZIE (*calling out through the French windows to Mrs. Harold*)
Did the paper come yet, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD
Yes, I just brought it in, — it's there on the table.

[*Mazie turns and comes back to the table, picks up the paper, and strolls forward, holding it up as though to allow the light from a window at the right to fall upon it.*

MAZIE
More rain again to-morrow.

MRS. HAROLD (*answering her from the front porch*)
Does it say so?

MAZIE
Unsettled to-night and Friday — probably thunder showers. Slightly cooler, with moderate winds.

MRS. HAROLD (*coming in*)
I don't know where all the rain is comin' from.

MAZIE
It isn't very nice weather for Mrs. Craig, is it?

MRS. HAROLD (*moving forward to the piano*)

You can't tell; it might not be rainin' in Albany. Aren't these roses beautiful?

MAZIE

Yes, they're lovely.

[*Mrs. Harold smells the roses.*

MRS. HAROLD (*crossing to the foot of the stairs*)

I heard her telling Miss Austen she's got over two hundred rose bushes in her garden.

MAZIE (*turning and looking at Mrs. Harold*)

Is she still upstairs?

MRS. HAROLD

Yeh. I guess she's talkin' poor Miss Austen to death. (*Mazie laughs and resumes her paper, and Mrs. Harold gives an eye around the room*) Bring that paper out with you when you're comin', Mazie; don't leave it layin' around in here.

MAZIE

All right.

MRS. HAROLD (*moving up to the door at the left and looking out*)

It'ud be just like the lady to walk in on us.

[*Mazie turns sharply and looks at her.*

MAZIE

Mrs. Craig, do you mean?

MRS. HAROLD

She might, you can't tell.

MAZIE

I thought you said she wouldn't be back before Saturday.

MRS. HAROLD (*coming back to the table and picking up the doilies*)

That's what she told me when she was goin' away.

But it's just as well to keep a day or two ahead of a woman like Mrs. Craig, Mazie (*she flicks the dust from the table with the doilies*); if she gets an idea up there that there's a pin out of place around here, — she'll take the first train out of Albany. (*Mazie makes a sound of amusement and resumes her paper and Mrs. Harold starts for the door at the right*) Oh, there's plenty like her — I've worked for three of them; you'd think their houses were God Almighty.

[*She goes into the other room.*

AZIE

Didn't you tell me, Mrs. Harold, that you worked out on Willows Avenue one time?

RS. HAROLD (*calling from the other room*)

Yes, I worked out there for two years, at Doctor Nicholson's.

AZIE

Did you know any people out that way by the name of Passmore?

RS. HAROLD (*appearing between the portières*)

By the name of what?

AZIE

Passmore. Capital P-a-double s-m-o-r-e. Mr. J. Fergus Passmore and wife.

RS. HAROLD (*coming forward at the right*)

No, I don't remember anybody by that name; why?

AZIE

Nothing. — It says here they were both found dead this morning in their home on Willows Avenue.

RS. HAROLD

Oh, Lord have mercy on them! What happened to them?

MAZIE (*reading*)

Why, it sez: "Fashionable Willows Avenue Residenc Scene of Double Tragedy — Bodies of J. Fergus Pass more and Wife, Socially Prominent in This City, Foun Dead in Library from Bullet Wounds — Empty Re volver Near Fireplace — Cause of Death Shrouded i Mystery — Police Working upon Identity of Gentle man Visitor Seen Leaving Premises in Automobil Shortly After Midnight." (*Mazie looks fearfully a Mrs. Harold, who shakes her head dolefully*) "Abou eight o'clock this morning upon entering the library i the home of Mr. J. Fergus Passmore of 2214 Willow Avenue, Miss Selma Coates, a colored maid —"

MRS. HAROLD

Twenty-two fourteen must be out near the lake. (*Th front doorbell rings incisively*) See who that is, Mazie.

[*Mrs. Harold disappears into the other room and Mazi crosses up to the door at the left, putting down the news paper on the table as she passes.*

MRS. CRAIG (*out on the porch*)

We can leave these right here, Ethel, — Mazie'll bring them in.

MAZIE

Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Craig.

MRS. CRAIG

Hello, Mazie.

MAZIE (*going out*)

You're back a little ahead of time.

[*Mrs. Harold comes in through the portières, peering out toward the front porch.*

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, a little. Will you take these things, Mazie?

MAZIE
Yes, Ma'm.

[*Mrs. Harold sees that it is Mrs. Craig, gives a quick glance around the room, snatches up the paper from the table, and, with another glance over her right shoulder toward the front door, vanishes into the other room.*

MRS. CRAIG
And will you see that that catch is on that screen door, Mazie —

MAZIE
Yes, Ma'm.

MRS. CRAIG (*appearing in the door*)
It was half open when I came in. (*She comes into the room, sweeping it with a narrow eye, and crosses to the table to put down her handbag and umbrella. Ethel wanders in after her and stands at the upper corner of the piano. The screen door closes outside*) Take your things off, dear, and sit down; you look tired. (*She moves across to the mirror over the mantelpiece at the right, and Ethel puts her handbag on the piano and commences to remove her coat and hat*) I think there's nothing in the world so exhausting as train riding. (*Mazie comes in, carrying a lady's satchel and a suitcase. Mrs. Craig turns*) You may as well take those things right upstairs, Mazie.

MAZIE
Yes, Ma'm.

MRS. CRAIG (*crossing up and over to Ethel*)
Put that suitcase in the corner room, Mazie — Miss Landreth'll occupy that room for the next few days.

MAZIE (*going up the stairs*)
Yes, Ma'm.

MRS. CRAIG (*taking Ethel's hat and coat*)
I'll take them, dear.

ETHEL
Thanks.

MRS. CRAIG
I'll have Mazie take them right up to your room.
[*She puts them down on the table carefully and Ethe crosses down towards the mirror, settling her hair.*

ETHEL
I suppose I look terrible, don't I?

MRS. CRAIG (*crossing and taking Ethel's bag from th piano*)
No, dear, you look quite all right. Would you like a drink of something?

ETHEL
I would like a drink of water, yes, if you don't mind.
[*Mrs. Harold appears between the portières.*

MRS. CRAIG
Hello, Mrs. Harold.

MRS. HAROLD
I see you're back again.

MRS. CRAIG
This is Mrs. Harold, Ethel.

ETHEL
How do you do.
[*Mrs. Harold bows and Ethel moves back again to the roses on the piano.*

MRS. CRAIG
Miss Landreth will be staying here with us for a week or two, Mrs. Harold, so I wish you'd see that everything is all right in that corner room.

MRS. HAROLD

All right, I will.

[*Mazie comes down the stairs.*

MRS. CRAIG (*moving down to the mirror, removing her coat*)

And will you bring a glass of water, please, Mrs. Harold.

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm. Just one glass?

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, I don't want any.

[*Mrs. Harold goes out again.*

ETHEL

Aren't these roses beautiful. (*Mrs. Craig shifts her eyes from Mazie, who is gathering Ethel's things up from the table, and looks steadily at the roses*) I don't think I've ever seen such lovely roses.

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, they're very nice. Take those things upstairs, Mazie.

MAZIE (*starting up the stairs*)

Yes, Ma'm.

MRS. CRAIG

And I wish you'd use that back way when you go up and down stairs, Mazie.

MAZIE (*coming down again*)

I always keep forgettin' that.

[*Ethel turns and looks at Mazie, and Mrs. Craig, laying her coat across Mazie's arm as she passes her, moves up to look at the stairs closely. Mazie goes out at the right.*

MRS. CRAIG

This stairway'll soon look the way it did before, with everybody tramping up and down it every five minutes. (*She turns to Ethel with a kind of apologetic smile, and*

*commences to remove her gloves*) It doesn't seem ever to occur to anybody in the house, Ethel, to use the back stairway. It's the funniest thing you've ever seen in your life, really. We might just as well not have one. No matter how many times they have to go up or down stairs, they must go tramping up and down this front way. And you know what stairs look like after they've been tramped up and down a few times. (*Mrs. Harold comes in with a glass of water on a small silver tray*) Thanks, Mrs. Harold.

ETHEL (*picking up a framed photograph from the piano*) Isn't this Mother's picture, Aunt Harriet?

[*Mrs. Harold goes out.*

MRS. CRAIG (*crossing to Ethel*) Yes, that's your mother.

ETHEL I thought it looked something like her.

MRS. CRAIG (*taking the picture*) She had it taken at Lakewood one summer, and I always liked it. I like that dress; it never seemed to get old-fashioned.

ETHEL (*starting to cry*) It doesn't look much like her now, does it?

[*She moves forward to the chair beside the piano and sits down.*

MRS. CRAIG (*putting the picture back on the piano*) Now, Ethel dear, you mustn't start that. Your mother's been through this very same kind of thing many times before.

ETHEL But, I should *be* there, Aunt Harriet. Supposing something should happen.

MRS. CRAIG

But, nothing is going to happen, dear child. I haven't the slightest doubt but that your mother will come through this little spell just as she's come through all the others.

ETHEL

I don't think the others have been as serious as this, though.

MRS. CRAIG

Listen, Ethel dear, I've seen your mother at least a dozen times at what I was perfectly sure was the point of death, and she's always come around all right.

ETHEL

Well, why did Doctor Wood send for me, if he didn't think it was serious?

MRS. CRAIG

Because your mother asked him to, I suppose, dear; just as she asked him to send for me. But he certainly couldn't have thought it was so very serious when he suggested you come away with me.

ETHEL

It wasn't the doctor that suggested that, Aunt Harriet, it was the night nurse, — I heard her tell him so. She said it upset Mother too much to see me, and if I were there she'd want to see me.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, that's very true, dear; but you know how she cried when you came in. And there's nothing in the world so upsetting to the heart as crying.

ETHEL

But, I should be there; it seems terrible to me now to have walked away and left Mother in that condition.

MRS. CRAIG

But, what could you do if you'd stayed, dear?

ETHEL (*with a touch of desperation*)

I'd at least know what was going on.

MRS. CRAIG (*handing her the glass of water, and putting her arm around her shoulder*)

Now, don't upset yourself, Ethel. Here, take a sip of this water. I'm perfectly sure you're magnifying the seriousness of your mother's condition, dear. And I most certainly should never have come away myself only that I've seen this same thing over and over again. (*She turns and settles the photograph on the piano*) Besides, there isn't a solitary thing we could do if we'd stayed; those nurses won't allow it. (*Taking the glass from Ethel*) And the doctor said I was upsetting your mother, — simply because I told her a few things I thought she should be told.

[*She crosses to the table and sets down the glass.*

ETHEL

There was something I wanted to tell her, too, but he said he thought I'd better wait.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, I'd have told her anyway, if I'd been you.

ETHEL

I'm rather sorry now I didn't, — I think it would have made her easier in her mind.

MRS. CRAIG (*taking her handkerchief from her bag*)

Was it something important?

ETHEL

It was about Professor Fredericks, at school. Mother met him last year when she was up there at Commencement, and she liked him very much. And when we got

home she said if he ever said anything to me, she'd be glad if I could like him well enough to marry him. She said she'd feel easier about me, in case anything ever happened to *her*. And I wanted to tell her.

MRS. CRAIG

You mean he *had* said something?

ETHEL

Yes, he asked me to marry him right after Easter. But I didn't write anything about it to Mother; I thought I'd wait until she'd be up there in June for my Commencement, and then I'd tell her.

MRS. CRAIG

I don't know why your mother should be so panicky about your future, Ethel; you're only nineteen.

ETHEL

She said she'd like to feel that I'd *have* somebody.

MRS. CRAIG

Why does a person need anybody, dear, if he has money enough to get along on? (*She turns and crosses to the mirror to remove her hat*) And, as a matter of fact, you wouldn't be left absolutely desolate even if something *did* happen to your mother. You'd always have me — I'm your mother's sister. So that, really, I think you're a very foolish girl, Ethel, if you allow your mother's apprehensions to rush you into marriage. Unless, of course, it were an advantageous marriage.

ETHEL

She didn't want to rush me into it — she simply said she thought it would be better for me to be settled.

MRS. CRAIG (*bringing her hat back to the table, and taking a powder puff from her bag*)

Well, naturally, I can understand that, of course.

But, after all, simply being settled isn't everything, Ethel — a girl can be a great deal worse off being settled than when she was unsettled. And, personally, I can't conceive of being very much worse off than married to a college professor — stuck away in some dreadful place like Poughkeepsie or Northampton — with not a ten-cent piece to bless yourself with — unless you used your own money. I'm constantly reading agitations in the newspapers about the poor pay of college professors. And your marrying one of them will hardly improve the situation. (*She flips the bag back on to the table, and moves forward to a small ornamental bench in front of the center table, where she kneels*) Did you accept this man when he asked you?

ETHEL

Practically, yes. We'd rather thought of being married sometime during the summer.

MRS. CRAIG

Then, you mean you're engaged to him?

ETHEL

Yes. I knew Mother liked him, for she said so. The only thing was, she wanted me to be sure that *I* liked him.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, that's all very nice, Ethel, but simply liking a man isn't going to go very far toward keeping things going, is it?

ETHEL

Well, I have money of my own, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

I know that, dear child, but surely he isn't marrying you because of that?

ETHEL

No, of course not; he doesn't know anything about that.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, I hope not — he surely wouldn't expect you to use your own money to keep *his* house going. If a man marries a girl he certainly must expect to support her, at least.

ETHEL

Well, he does expect to support me, naturally.

MRS. CRAIG

How, dear — on a professor's salary?

ETHEL

Why, lots of professors are married, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

But their wives are not living the way you've been accustomed to living, Ethel: not the wives of young professors, at least. And I suppose this man is young, isn't he?

ETHEL

He's twenty-seven.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, there you are. He's very lucky if he's getting two hundred dollars a month: unless he's some very extraordinary kind of professor; and he can scarcely be that at twenty-seven years of age.

ETHEL

He's professor of the Romance Languages.

MRS. CRAIG

Naturally. And I suppose he's told you he loves you in all of them.

ETHEL

Well, I certainly shouldn't care to think about marriage

at all, Aunt Harriet, unless I were at least in love with the man.

[*Mrs. Craig gives a little smile of pained amusement, and moves towards Ethel.*

MRS. CRAIG

That is your age, Ethel darling: we all pass through that. It's the snare of romance, — that the later experience of life shows us to have been nothing more than the most impractical sentimentality. (*She arranges the piano scarf more precisely*) Only the majority of women are caught with the spell of it, unfortunately; and then they are obliged to revert right back to the almost primitive feminine dependence and subjection that they've been trying to emancipate themselves from for centuries.

[*She crosses to the big chair at the left of the center table and straightens it.*

ETHEL

Well, *you* married, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG (*leaning on the back of the chair*)

But not with any romantic illusions, dear. I saw to it that my marriage should be a way toward emancipation for *me*. I had no private fortune like you, Ethel; and no special equipment, — outside of a few more or less inapplicable college theories. So the only road to independence for *me*, that *I* could see, was through the man I married. I know that must sound extremely materialistic to *you*, after listening to the professor of romantic languages; — but it isn't really; because it isn't financial independence that I speak of particularly. I knew that would come — as the result of *another* kind of independence; and that is the independence of

authority — *over* the man I married. And that doesn't necessarily imply any dishonesty of attitude toward that man, either. I have a full appreciation of Mr. Craig — he's a very good man; but he's a husband — a lord and master — *my* master. And I married to be independent.

ETHEL

Independent of your husband too, do you mean?

MRS. CRAIG

Independent of everybody. I lived with a stepmother, Ethel, for nearly twelve years, and with your mother after she was married for over five; I know what it is to be on some one else's floor. And I married to be on my own — in every sense of the word. I haven't entirely achieved the condition yet — but I know it can be done.

[*She turns and glances up the stairs and out through the portières, to assure herself that no one is listening.*

ETHEL

I don't understand what you mean, exactly, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning to Ethel again*)

I mean that I'm simply exacting my share of a bargain. Mr. Craig wanted a wife and a home; and he has them. And he can be perfectly sure of them, because the wife that he got happens to be one of the kind that regards her husband and home as more or less ultimate conditions. And my share of the bargain was the security and protection that those conditions imply. And I have *them*. But, unlike Mr. Craig, I can't be absolutely sure of them; because I know that, to a very great extent, they are at the mercy of the *mood* of a *man*.

(*She smiles knowingly*) And I suppose I'm too practical-minded to accept that as a sufficient guarantee of their permanence. So I must secure their permanence for myself.

ETHEL

How?

MRS. CRAIG

By securing into my own hands the control of the man upon which they are founded.

ETHEL

How are you ever going to do a thing like that, Aunt Harriet?

MRS. CRAIG

Haven't you ever made Mr. Fredericks do something you wanted him to do?

ETHEL

Yes, but I always told him that I wanted him to do it.

MRS. CRAIG (*half-sitting on the arm of the big chair*)

But there are certain things that men can't be told, Ethel; they don't understand them; particularly romantic men; and Mr. Craig is inveterately idealistic.

ETHEL

But, supposing he were to find out sometime?

MRS. CRAIG

Find out what?

ETHEL

What you've just been telling me — that you wanted to control him.

MRS. CRAIG

One never comprehends, dear, what it is not in one's nature to comprehend. And even if it were possible, what about it? It's such an absolutely unprovable

thing; that is, I mean to say, it isn't a thing that one does or says, specifically; it's a matter of — interpretation. (*She is amused*) And that's where women have such a tremendous advantage over men; so few men are capable of interpreting them. But, they can always interpret themselves, if they're so disposed. And if the interpretation is for the instruction of a romantic husband, a woman can always keep it safely within the exigencies of the moment. (*She laughs a little, and moves over to Ethel, resting her hand on Ethel's shoulder*) I know you're mentally deploring my lack of nobility.

ETHEL

No, I'm not at all, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, you are, I see it in your face. (*She crosses to the front of the center table*) You think I'm a very sordid woman.

ETHEL

No, I don't think anything of the kind.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning to Ethel*)

Well, what *do* you think?

ETHEL

Well, frankly, Aunt Harriet, I don't think it's quite honest.

MRS. CRAIG

But it's very much safer, dear — for everybody. Because, as I say, if a woman is the right kind of a woman, it's better that the destiny of her home should be in *her* hands — than in any man's. (*Mrs. Harold appears between the portières*) Did you want to see me about something, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD

It'll do after a while, Mrs. Craig; I thought the young lady had gone upstairs.

MRS. CRAIG

No, not yet, she's going up immediately. (*Turning to Ethel*) That's what I want you to do, Ethel — go upstairs and lie down for an hour or so; you'll feel ever so much better. I'll call you in time for dinner.

[*Ethel rises and moves towards the stairs.*

ETHEL

I don't think I'll be able to eat any dinner, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG (*guiding Ethel towards the stairs*)

Well, now, you might feel very different after you've had a bit of a rest.

ETHEL

I'm so terribly worried, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

I know, dear child, it's very trying; but it's one of the things we've got to go through with, I suppose. Besides, worrying can't possibly help her, dear.

[*Mrs. Craig continues with Ethel up to the landing, and Ethel goes on up the stairs.*

ETHEL

Oh, how can I help worrying.

MRS. CRAIG

You can't help it, of course, dear; that's the reason I want you to lie down for a while. I'll be up in a few minutes — just as soon as I've seen to a few things down here. It's the room straight down the hall, to the right. Mazie's very likely in there now. And don't worry,

dear. (*Ethel disappears at the head of the stairs, and Mrs. Craig looks closely at the landing, to see if she can discover any fresh scratches upon it. Mrs. Harold comes in at the right*) What was it you wanted to see me about, Mrs. Harold?

[*She comes down into the room again.*

MRS. HAROLD

Why, I wanted to tell you, Mrs. Craig, that the cook left on Thursday. She went away and didn't come back.

MRS. CRAIG

Did she get her wages?

MRS. HAROLD

I paid her up till Tuesday.

MRS. CRAIG

Did she take her things with her?

MRS. HAROLD

Why, she only had a suitcase and a small graphophone; she took *them*. But I didn't think anything about it, because she took *them* every Thursday.

MRS. CRAIG

Have you been doing the cooking since, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, we've been managin' between us. Mazie's a pretty good cook. I called up the Camac Agency on Saturday to send somebody out, but Miss Hewlitt said she wanted to see you first. (*Mrs. Craig looks at her*) She sez she's sent so many, she wants to find out what's the matter before she sends any more.

MRS. CRAIG (*crossing to the piano*)

She ought to have a few of them cook for her; she'd *know* what was the matter. Where did these roses come from, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD

Why, that woman across the street brought them over to Miss Austen.

MRS. CRAIG

Mrs. Frazier, you mean?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm, she brought them over to the porch — Miss Austen was sitting out there sewing.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you'd better take them out of here, Mrs. Harold: the petals'll be all over the room.

[*Mrs. Harold moves across to the roses, and Mrs. Craig busies herself with the draperies in the bay window beyond the piano.*

MRS. HAROLD

You didn't have to stay away as long as you thought, did you?

MRS. CRAIG

Well, I suppose I *could* have stayed away indefinitely, if I had allowed myself to become sentimental. But I'm afraid I haven't very much patience with sick people, Mrs. Harold.

[*Mrs. Harold takes the vase of roses and starts back across towards the portières.*

MRS. HAROLD

Well, I suppose it takes all kinds to make a world.

MRS. CRAIG

I suppose so.

MRS. HAROLD (*stopping, and turning*)

Where do you want these roses put, Mrs. Craig?

MRS. CRAIG

I don't care where you put them, Mrs. Harold, as long

as they're not in the rooms; I don't want to be picking up petals every two minutes.

MRS. HAROLD

Maybe Miss Austen 'ud like them in her room.

MRS. CRAIG (*moving down to examine the spot where the vase stood*)

Maybe she would; you can ask her. Is she up there now?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm; Mrs. Frazier is showing her something about a pattern that she has.

[*Mrs. Craig looks at her.*

MRS. CRAIG

Do you mean to tell me that Mrs. Frazier is upstairs, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm, she's up there.

MRS. CRAIG

And how did she happen to *get* up there?

MRS. HAROLD

Well, I don't know, I'm sure, Mrs. Craig, unless Miss Austen asked her.

MRS. CRAIG

All right. (*She crosses to the foot of the stairs and looks up, and Mrs. Harold goes out through the portières*) Have there been any letters or messages for me, Mrs. Harold, since I've been away?

MRS. HAROLD

Why, there were two letters, yes; I left them in your room. (*Coming into the room again*) One came this morning, and one came Tuesday. And there was a gentleman called Mr. Craig last night about eight o'clock,

but he'd gone out. So I gave him the telephone number that Mr. Craig gave me in case anybody called him.

MRS. CRAIG

Who was the gentleman? Did you get his name?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm, he said his name was Birkmire.

MRS. CRAIG

Do you know if he got Mr. Craig all right?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm, he did; because when I told Mr. Craig this morning about him calling, he said it was all right, that he'd talked to him last night. (*Mrs. Craig nods and moves down to the center table*) And then he called again this afternoon about half-past four.

[*Mrs. Craig turns and looks at her.*

MRS. CRAIG

Mr. Birkmire did?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm; he said he wanted Mr. Craig to get in touch with him as soon as he came in.

MRS. CRAIG

What number was it Mr. Craig gave you last night, Mrs. Harold, to have Mr. Birkmire call him at?

MRS. HAROLD

Why, it was Levering three, one hundred. I wrote it down on a piece of paper, so I wouldn't forget it.

MRS. CRAIG

All right, Mrs. Harold, I'll tell him when he comes. (*Mrs. Harold goes out*) And will you get another vase for those roses, Mrs. Harold, before you take them up —

MRS. HAROLD

All right, I will.

MRS. CRAIG

That one belongs down here. (*She stands and thinks quietly for a second; then, with a glance up the stairs and out after Mrs. Harold, she moves to the telephone and picks it up*) Give me Information, please.

[*She waits, glancing toward the other room and up the stairs. Mazie comes down the stairs.*

MAZIE

Miss Landreth sent me down for her bag.

MRS. CRAIG

It's there on the table. (*Mazie picks up the bag from the table and starts for the stairs again. Mrs. Craig looks steadily at her and is about to speak when Mazie thinks of herself and turns back, crossing towards the portières*) Take that glass out, too, Mazie.

MAZIE (*picking up the glass from the table as she goes*) Yes, Ma'm.

MRS. CRAIG (*into the telephone*)

Information? Why, could you give me the address of the telephone number, Levering three, one hundred? Oh, don't you? — All right, it isn't important — thank you very much.

[*She stands thinking for a second. Then the screen door outside bangs, and she sets down the telephone and moves towards the door. Mr. Craig comes in briskly, wearing a Panama hat and carrying a newspaper.*

CRAIG

Well, look who's here, bright and smiling!

[*He advances, removing his hat, and she moves a step or two towards him.*

MRS. CRAIG

You almost beat me home.

CRAIG

How did this happen? (*He kisses her affectionately*) When did you get in, Harriet?

MRS. CRAIG (*taking his hat and the newspaper from him and putting them on the table*)

A few minutes ago. I left Albany at noon.

CRAIG (*tossing his gloves on the piano*)

And how is it you didn't wire or something?

MRS. CRAIG (*picking up her own gloves from the table and straightening out the fingers*)

I never thought of it, to tell the truth; there was so much to be done around there — getting Ethel's things together, and one thing and another.

CRAIG

Was Ethel there?

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, Estelle insisted that she be sent for last Saturday. And for the life of me I don't know why she did such a thing; for it upset her terribly. So the doctor said he thought the best thing to do would be to get Ethel out of her sight for a few days: so I brought her back with me. She's upstairs, lying down.

CRAIG

How *is* Estelle?

MRS. CRAIG

Why, I couldn't see that there was anything the matter with her — any more than usual. But you'd think from her letter she was dying. And then I have to walk out, and leave my house for a whole week, and go racing up to Albany.

CRAIG

Has she a trained nurse?

MRS. CRAIG (*picking up his hat from the table*)
My dear, she's had two of them, for over six weeks. But you know what trained nurses are.

CRAIG
Well, I'm sorry to hear Estelle is so bad.

MRS. CRAIG (*handing him his hat*)
Here, take this, Walter.

CRAIG (*drawing her back into his arms*)
But I'm glad to have you back again.

MRS. CRAIG (*laughing lightly*)
Stop it, Walter.

CRAIG
Seems you've been away a month instead of a week.
[*He kisses the side of her head.*

MRS. CRAIG
Don't break my bones, Walter!

CRAIG
That's what I think I'd like to do sometimes.

MRS. CRAIG (*laughing*)
Now, stop it. (*He releases her and she straightens up, touching her hair*) Stop. Here, take this hat and put it out where it belongs. (*He takes the hat and crosses above her towards the portières*) And take this paper out of here too; this room's a sight. (*He steps back and takes the paper, then goes on out into the other room*) Your aunt's company will be scandalized.

CRAIG (*from the other room*)
Has Auntie Austen got some company?

MRS. CRAIG (*moving up to arrange the pillows on the fancy seat at the right of the stairway*)
So Mrs. Harold says. She's upstairs with her.

CRAIG (*reëntering, and crossing directly over to the bay window at the left*)
Who is it?

MRS. CRAIG
The lady of the roses, across the street there.

CRAIG
Mrs. Frazier?

MRS. CRAIG
Yes. She's getting very sociable.

CRAIG
She certainly has some beautiful roses over there, hasn't she?

MRS. CRAIG
She ought to have; she has nothing to do but look after them.

CRAIG
Those ramblers make a pretty effect, down at the side there, don't they?

MRS. CRAIG
Wait till you see them a week from now.

CRAIG (*turning to her*)
Why?

MRS. CRAIG
Why, there'll be petals all over the place over there.

CRAIG
That ought to be prettier than the way it is now.

MRS. CRAIG
Well, you might not think it was so pretty if you had to sweep them up.

CRAIG (*taking some papers from his inside pocket, and moving to the chair beside the piano*)
I wouldn't sweep them up. (*Mrs. Craig makes a sound*

*of vast amusement*) I can't think of anything much prettier than to have rose petals scattered all over the lawn.

[*He sits down.*

MRS. CRAIG (*straightening the big chair in front of the fireplace*)

You'd have a nice looking place, I must say.

CRAIG

It's a wonder she wouldn't bring a few of those roses over here to Auntie Austen.

MRS. CRAIG

I guess she has sense enough to know that if we wanted roses we could plant some. (*She starts across towards him, above the center table, glancing toward the head of the stairs*) Listen; she's apt to be down here any minute, Walter, and if I were you I wouldn't be sitting there when she comes; for if she sees you you'll never get away till she's told you her entire history. I've just escaped it twice.

[*She gathers her things together on the table.*

CRAIG

I've talked to her a couple of times on the way up from the garage.

MRS. CRAIG

You mean she's talked to you.

CRAIG

No, she was out there fixing the roses when I came by.

MRS. CRAIG

Of course she was. That's where she is most of the time. (*Becoming confidential, and moving towards him, below the table*) And the funny part of it is, Walter, I don't think she realizes that people know exactly why

she does it. Really, it's the most transparently obvious thing I've ever seen in my life.

CRAIG

Well, why do you think she does it?

MRS. CRAIG

Why do I think she does it?

CRAIG

Yes.

[*Mrs. Craig laughs, with a shade of amused impatience.*

MRS. CRAIG

Well now, Walter — why do certain women go about all the time with a child by the hand, or a dog on a leash. To facilitate the — approach. (*She returns to the table and puts her gloves in her pocketbook; and Craig sits looking at her, mystified*) Only the lady upstairs uses roses. So, really, I wouldn't be sitting there when she comes down, if I were you, Walter; you know there *is* a danger in propinquity.

CRAIG (*resuming his letters*)

I guess she could have gotten plenty of men if she'd wanted them.

MRS. CRAIG

But she may not have been able to get the kind she wanted. And *you* may be the kind. (*He looks at her and laughs*) And this little visit this afternoon, laden with flowers, may be simply the initial attack in a very highly premeditated campaign.

CRAIG

Did you say she brought some flowers over this afternoon?

MRS. CRAIG

I said, "highly premeditated." I believe you told me you'd stopped a number of times to talk to her.

CRAIG

I've stopped twice, as a matter of fact.

MRS. CRAIG

And admired her roses?

CRAIG

There was nothing much else to talk about.

MRS. CRAIG

Of course there wasn't; that's the point. And if there hadn't been any roses, there wouldn't have been anything at all to talk about. And you wouldn't have stopped, and talked. (*She looks at him directly and smiles*) But since you did, why — it isn't at all inconceivable that she should conclude that you probably liked roses. And that you might regard it as a very charming little gesture if she were to just bring a few over sometime — to your aunt — when your wife was out of the city.

CRAIG (*leaning back against the piano and looking at his letters*)

What are you trying to do, kid me, Harriet?

MRS. CRAIG

Not at all. Don't lean back against that piano that way, Walter, you might scratch it.

CRAIG

My coat won't scratch it.

MRS. CRAIG (*crossing hurriedly*)

Well, there might be something in your pocket that will. (*She pushes him away from the piano*) Now, sit up. (*She gives him a little slap on the back*) Sit over there.

[*She indicates the big chair at the left of the center table, and he rises good-naturedly and crosses to it. Then she*

*busies herself examining the spot on the piano where he leaned, and settling the piano scarf carefully.*

CRAIG

Yes, sir, I think that's what you're trying to do, Harriet, just kid me.

MRS. CRAIG

Well now, do you think what I've been saying is at all improbable?

CRAIG

No, it isn't improbable; it's just funny.

MRS. CRAIG (*crossing back to the table and gathering all her things up*)

The flowers were on the piano when I came in.

CRAIG

Well, if they were they were for Auntie Austen.

MRS. CRAIG

Maybe they were. I sent them up to her room, anyway. So Mrs. Frazier probably thinks I *thought* they were for Auntie Austen. (*She starts for the portières at the right, and he looks after her and laughs. She turns and looks at him*) What are you laughing at?

CRAIG

You.

MRS. CRAIG

Really?

CRAIG

You're very amusing to-night.

MRS. CRAIG (*coming forward at the right of the table*)

And I think you're just a little bit reckless, Walter — sitting there tempting the temptress.

CRAIG

You know, I think you're getting jealous of me, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG (*amused*)

Not at all, dear boy; I'm simply suspicious of rich, middle-aged divorcees, who specialize in wayside roses. [*She leans on her umbrella.*

CRAIG

Mrs. Frazier isn't a divorcee.

MRS. CRAIG

Isn't she?

CRAIG

No, her husband was killed in an automobile accident in 1915. She told me so herself. She was in the car with him.

MRS. CRAIG

And how is it she wasn't killed?

CRAIG (*laughing a little*)

Well now, does everybody have to be killed in automobile accidents?

MRS. CRAIG

No, there's always the Galveston Flood, for husbands. You're a very guileless young man, Walter; and I'm sorry your mind doesn't work just a little bit more rapidly.

CRAIG

It works pretty thoroughly, though, when it sees the point.

MRS. CRAIG

But, that's a very slight advantage, Walter, if the point is made before you see it.

CRAIG

Do you know, I'd like to be able to see just what's going on in your mind to-night.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, if you could, I daresay you'd find something very

similar to what's going on in the minds of most of our neighbors these days.

CRAIG

Now, just what do you mean by that?

MRS. CRAIG

They have eyes, Walter; and they use them. And I wish you'd use yours. And I also wish you'd tell me whose telephone number Levering three, one hundred is.

CRAIG

Fergus Passmore, why?

MRS. CRAIG

Nothing, I was just wondering. Mrs. Harold told me you gave her that number last night in case anybody wanted you, and I was wondering where it was.

[*She moves towards the door again.*

CRAIG

Fergus Passmore's. I was playing cards out there last night. I ran into him yesterday in front of the First National, and he asked me to come out there last night and play a little poker.

MRS. CRAIG

What did Billy Birkmire want you for?

CRAIG

Why, a —

MRS. CRAIG

Mrs. Harold said he called you up.

CRAIG

Yes, Fergus told me to get hold of him, too, and bring him out there; so I did; but he called me up later to tell me that his father had just come in from St. Paul, and he wouldn't be able to make it. I wasn't here when he called, so I talked to him from there.

MRS. CRAIG
I hope you're not going to get into card-playing again, Walter.

CRAIG
Why, I never gave up card-playing.

MRS. CRAIG
Well, you haven't played in nearly a year.

CRAIG
Well, I suppose that's because *you* don't play. And most of the folks know that, so they don't ask *me*. I don't suppose Fergus would have asked me yesterday, only that I happened to mention that *you* were away.

MRS. CRAIG
Was his wife there?

CRAIG
She was for a while, but she didn't play; she was going out somewhere.

MRS. CRAIG
I suppose that's the reason Fergus asked you, wasn't it?

CRAIG
What do you mean?

MRS. CRAIG
Why, you know how insanely jealous of her he used to be.

CRAIG
Well, I'm sure he was never jealous of me.

MRS. CRAIG
He was jealous of everybody, from what I could see.

CRAIG
Oh, don't be silly, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG
Well, you wouldn't know it, Walter, even if he were.

CRAIG

Well, I'm glad I wouldn't.

MRS. CRAIG

And you come to find out, I'll bet that's just the reason Billy Birkmire dodged it. I'll bet that's just what he called you up to tell you.

CRAIG

He didn't call me up to tell me anything of the kind, now, Harriet; he simply called me to tell me that his father had come in unexpectedly from —

MRS. CRAIG

I don't mean last night; I mean when he called you to-day.

CRAIG

He didn't call me to-day.

MRS. CRAIG

He did, this afternoon, around four o'clock.

CRAIG

Here?

MRS. CRAIG

So Mrs. Harold told me. Said he wanted you to get in touch with him as soon as you came in.

CRAIG (*rising, and crossing to the telephone*)

Wonder why he didn't call the office.

MRS. CRAIG (*moving towards the portières*)

Probably he did, and you'd gone.

CRAIG

What's Birkmire's number, do you know?

MRS. CRAIG (*turning at the door*)

Park 840, isn't it? Unless they've changed it.

CRAIG

I think it is.

MRS. CRAIG (*lowering her voice*)
And I'm really serious, Walter, about that woman upstairs.

CRAIG (*into the telephone*)
Park 840.

[*There is a laugh from Mrs. Frazier, at the head of the stairs.*

MRS. CRAIG
So if I were you I wouldn't be here when she comes down.

[*He silences her with a gesture; and, with a glance towards the head of the stairs, she goes out at the right.*

MRS. FRAZIER
I used to have considerable difficulty myself, when I first started to use them.

CRAIG
Hello — Park 840?

MISS AUSTEN (*at the head of the stairs*)
Well, I think I understand it now.

CRAIG
Is Mr. Birkmire there? (*Mrs. Frazier and Miss Austen come down the stairs*) Oh, that's too bad; I just missed him, didn't I?

MRS. FRAZIER
Well now, please don't hesitate to call me, Miss Austen, if there's anything you don't understand, —

CRAIG
Yes, this is Mr. Craig speaking.

MISS AUSTEN
I will, I'll let you know.

MRS. FRAZIER
Because I haven't a solitary thing to do.

[*She sees Mr. Craig at the telephone, and turns to Miss Austen, laying her finger on her lips.*

CRAIG

Then, he'll probably be here pretty soon. (*Mrs. Frazier comes down into the room, and Miss Austen stops on the landing, looking at Mr. Craig*) Thanks — that's fine. Thank you very much.

[*He hangs up.*

MISS AUSTEN

Hello, Walter.

CRAIG

Hellow, Auntie. How are you?

MISS AUSTEN (*coming down from the landing*)

I didn't know you were home.

CRAIG

Just got in this minute. How do you do, Mrs. Frazier.

MRS. FRAZIER

How do you do, Mr. Craig.

MISS AUSTEN

Mrs. Frazier was kind enough to come up and show me something about a new pattern that I just bought.

CRAIG

That so?

MISS AUSTEN

Mrs. Harold tells me that Harriet is home.

CRAIG

Yes, she just got in ahead of me.

MISS AUSTEN

Did she say how Mrs. Landreth was?

CRAIG

Pretty bad shape, I imagine, from what she says.

MISS AUSTEN

Where is Harriet, upstairs?

CRAIG
Yes, she's just taken her things up.

MRS. FRAZIER
Miss Austen was telling me that Mrs. Craig's sister has heart trouble.

CRAIG
Yes, she's had it a long time.

MRS. FRAZIER
Poor woman.

MISS AUSTEN
Nearly ten years.

MRS. FRAZIER
How unfortunate. I suppose Mrs. Craig is very much upset, isn't she?

CRAIG
Yes, I suppose she is.

MRS. FRAZIER
Is she her only sister?

CRAIG
Yes, there are just the two of them.

MRS. FRAZIER
Too bad. But, that's the way it seems to go as a rule, doesn't it?

CRAIG
Yes, that's true.

MISS AUSTEN
Walter, you should see all the wonderful roses Mrs. Frazier just brought me over.

[*Mrs. Frazier gives a little deprecating laugh and moves towards the piano at the left.*

CRAIG
Oh, yes?

MISS AUSTEN

They're perfectly beautiful.

MRS. FRAZIER

Not a very generous giving, I'm afraid, when there are so many of them.

CRAIG AND MISS AUSTEN (*speaking together*)

CRAIG: Well, I'm sure we appreciate it very much.

MISS AUSTEN: I think it's very charming of you to remember us at all.

MRS. FRAZIER

Sometimes I think perhaps I am a bit foolish to have so many of them, because it *is* a lot of work.

MISS AUSTEN

It must be; I often say that to Walter.

MRS. FRAZIER

Yes, it is. But, you see, they were more or less of a hobby with my husband when he was alive; and I suppose I tend them out of sentiment, really, more than anything else.

MISS AUSTEN

How long has your husband been dead, Mrs. Frazier?

MRS. FRAZIER

He'll be dead ten years this coming November. Yes. Yes, he died the twenty-third of November, 1915. He was injured on the second, in an automobile accident at Pride's Crossing, Massachusetts: we were on our way back from Bar Harbor — I was telling Mr. Craig about it. And he lingered from that until the twenty-third. So, you see, the melancholy days have really a very literal significance for me.

MISS AUSTEN

I should say so, indeed.

MRS. FRAZIER

Yes, that is the one month I must get away. I don't care where I go, but I must go somewhere; I couldn't stand it here; I have too many memories. So every year, as soon as ever November comes around, I just pack up my things and go out to Dayton, Ohio. I have a married daughter living out there; her husband is connected with the National Cash Register Company. And, of course, she makes all manner of fun of my annual pilgrimages to Dayton. She says instead of being in England now that April's there, with me it's in Dayton now that November's there. (*She laughs faintly*) We have great fun about it. But, of course, her husband's business is there. And I think sometimes perhaps I should spend more time with her; I think it would help us both. But the trouble is, when I go out there, it's so very difficult for me to get away again. She has the most adorable baby — just fifteen months old; and he thinks there's nobody in the world like his grandmother. And, of course, *I* think there's nobody in the world like *him*. Although, to tell the truth, I did resent him terrifically when he was born — to think that he'd made me a grandmother. But he's quite won me over; and I suppose I'm as foolish now as all the other grandmothers.

MISS AUSTEN

Is she your only daughter, Mrs. Frazier?

MRS. FRAZIER

Yes, she was my only child.

CRAIG

Then, you live alone over here, Mrs. Frazier?

MRS. FRAZIER

All alone, yes.

MISS AUSTEN

Is that so?

MRS. FRAZIER

Yes, I've lived alone now for nearly four years — ever since my daughter was married. Alone at fifty. (*She laughs lightly*) Rather a premature desolation, isn't it? [*She laughs again, a little.*

CRAIG

Certainly is.

MISS AUSTEN

I should say so.

MRS. FRAZIER

I remember reading a story by that name one time, a number of years ago; and I remember thinking then, how dreadful that would be — to be left alone — especially for a woman. And yet the very same thing happened to me before I was fifty.

MISS AUSTEN

Well, didn't you ever think of going out and living with your daughter, Mrs. Frazier?

MRS. FRAZIER

Well, of course, she has never given up trying to persuade me to do that; but I always say to her, "No, darling, I will live out my days in your father's house — even though he isn't there." I say, "I have my memories, at least; and nobody can take those from me." Of course, she says I'm sentimental; (*she laughs*) but I'm not, really — not the least bit. Because if I were, I should have probably married again; but I feel that —

CRAIG

I should think you would have married again, Mrs. Frazier.

MRS. FRAZIER

Well, I suppose that would have been the logical thing to do, Mr. Craig; but, I don't know — I suppose perhaps I'm one of those one-man women. There are such women, you know.

MISS AUSTEN

Yes, indeed there are.

MRS. FRAZIER

Just as there are one-woman men. And I think it's particularly unfortunate when anything happens to the attachment of a person of that kind — whether it's death, or disillusionment, or whatever it is — because the impairment is always so absolutely irreparable. A person of that type can never care very greatly again, about anything.

MISS AUSTEN (*looking away off*)

That's very true, Mrs. Frazier.

MRS. FRAZIER (*falling into a mood*)

Never. (*She shakes her head slowly from side to side; then starts*) Well, I think I'd better go, or you'll be agreeing with my daughter that I'm sentimental.

[*They follow her towards the door.*

MISS AUSTEN AND CRAIG (*speaking together*)

MISS AUSTEN: Oh, not at all, Mrs. Frazier; I agree with you perfectly.

CRAIG: I think a little bit of sentiment is a very nice thing sometimes.

MRS. FRAZIER (*turning at the door*)

And I do hope you'll tell Mrs. Craig that I was inquiring about her sister.

CRAIG

I will, Mrs. Frazier, thank you very much.

MRS. FRAZIER
I hope she'll be better soon.
Good afternoon, Mr. Craig.
[*She goes out.*

CRAIG
Good afternoon, Mrs. Frazier. I hope you'll come over again very soon.

MRS. FRAZIER (*calling back*)
Thanks ever so much, I shall be delighted to.

MISS AUSTEN (*following her out*)
And thanks again for the roses.
[*Craig turns away from the door and goes up the stairs. Mrs. Craig appears between the portières, looking darkly towards the bay window at the left, where Mrs. Frazier can be seen passing across the lawn.*

MRS. FRAZIER
Oh, don't mention it, dear child, I should have brought you twice as many.

MISS AUSTEN
And I'll let you know if there's anything I don't understand as I go along.

MRS. FRAZIER
Please do, now, Miss Austen; don't hesitate to call me.

MISS AUSTEN
I will, I'll let you know.

MRS. FRAZIER
Good-by.

MISS AUSTEN
Good-by, Mrs. Frazier.
[*The screen door slams. Mrs. Craig moves forward to the mirror over the mantelpiece at the right.*

MRS. CRAIG

The silly creature.

[*She stands looking in the mirror, touching her hair. Miss Austen comes in.*

MISS AUSTEN (*stopping just inside the door*)

Oh, Harriet, I was just going up to your room. How did you find your sister? Mrs. Harold told me a moment ago that you were back.

MRS. CRAIG (*without turning*)

Yes, I'm back. (*Turning, with a touch of challenge in her manner*) And I think it's about time I *came* back, don't you?

MISS AUSTEN

Why, dear?

MRS. CRAIG

Why?

MISS AUSTEN

Yes, I don't understand what you mean.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, from the looks of things, if I'd stayed away much longer, I should have probably come back to find my house a thoroughfare for the entire neighborhood.

MISS AUSTEN

You mean Mrs. Frazier being here?

MRS. CRAIG

You know perfectly well what I mean, Auntie Austen; please don't try to appear so innocent. (*She moves up to the foot of the stairs, to assure herself that Mr. Craig is not within hearing distance. Miss Austen gives her a long, narrow look and moves forward at the right of the piano. There is a pause; then Mrs. Craig comes forward to the*

*center table in a perfect fury*) That's exactly what that woman's been trying to do ever since we've been here; and the minute you get my back turned you let her succeed — just for the sake of a lot of small talk. How did she happen to get in here?

MISS AUSTEN

Why, I asked her in, of course; you don't suppose she walked in of her own accord.

MRS. CRAIG

I wouldn't put it past her, if she knew I was away. (*Miss Austen looks at her*) I know Mrs. Frazier's type better than you do. (*She settles the things on the table*) What did you do; go over after her?

MISS AUSTEN

No, I did not. I was sewing on the porch there, and she brought me some roses over, which I think was very thoughtful of her.

MRS. CRAIG

Very thoughtful.

MISS AUSTEN

And I happened to mention the dress that I was making, and that the pattern that I'd bought for it wasn't quite clear to me. And she seemed to know from my description just what pattern it was, and very kindly offered to help me.

MRS. CRAIG

Of course; and you walked right into the trap.

MISS AUSTEN (*turning to her*)

Well, why do you think she should be so anxious to get in *here*, Harriet?

MRS. CRAIG

For the same reason that a lot of other women in this

neighborhood want to get in here — to satisfy their vulgar curiosity; and see what they can see.

MISS AUSTEN

And, why should you care if they do see?

MRS. CRAIG

I wouldn't gratify them — I don't want a lot of idle neighbors on visiting terms. Let them tend to their houses, and they'll have plenty to do: instead of wasting their time with a lot of silly roses. (*She crosses down to the mirror again*) Mrs. Frazier is very likely one of those housekeepers that hides the dirt in the corners with a bunch of roses.

MISS AUSTEN

You know nothing about her house, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

I know what her lawn looks like, — that's enough for me. (*Turning*) And you had to bring her upstairs, too, for fear she wouldn't see enough down here.

MISS AUSTEN

I don't suppose the woman knows what you've got in your house, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

Oh, Auntie Austen! Really, I wish you were as guileless in certain other respects as you seem to be in the matter of visiting neighbors.

MISS AUSTEN

A good neighbor is a very good thing sometimes, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you may have them; I don't want them running in and out to me.

MISS AUSTEN

None of them has ever run in and out to you so far that I remember.

MRS. CRAIG

One of them has just left.

MISS AUSTEN

She wasn't here to see you.

MRS. CRAIG

She was in my house, wasn't she?

MISS AUSTEN

And in your husband's house.

MRS. CRAIG

Oh — (*She gives a little laugh of mirthless amusement*) Well, she was hardly here to see my husband, was she? [*Miss Austen holds her eye for a second.*

MISS AUSTEN

No, she was not; although I've no doubt you'd attempt such an interpretation if you thought there was any possibility of Walter's believing it. I don't think any extremity would be too great for you, Harriet, as long as it kept people out of the Temple of the Lord. This Holy of Holies. It's a great wonder to me you haven't asked us to take off our shoes, when we walk across the carpet. (*Mr. Craig coughs, somewhere upstairs, and Mrs. Craig moves suddenly to the foot of the stairs and looks up*) Mrs. Frazier was here to see *me*, your husband's aunt. And I made her welcome; and so did he. And asked her to come back again. And I don't think you'd find him very much in accord with your attitude, if he knew about it.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you'll probably tell him.

MISS AUSTEN

Oh, I've got a lot of things to tell him, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

I've no doubt you have.

MISS AUSTEN

I've had plenty of time to think about them during the past two years, up there in my room. And they've been particularly clear to me this past week that you've been away. That's why I've decided to tell Walter; (*Mrs. Craig turns sharply and looks at her*) because I think he should be told. Only I want you to be here when I tell him, so that you won't be able to *twist* what I say.

MRS. CRAIG (*coming forward to the table*)

You have a very good opinion of me, haven't you, Auntie Austen?

MISS AUSTEN

It isn't an opinion I have of you at all, Harriet; it's *you* that I have.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, whatever it is, I'm not at all interested in hearing about it. And I want you to know that I resent intensely your having brought Mrs. Frazier in here.

MISS AUSTEN (*turning away*)

Oh, be honest about it, at least, Harriet!

MRS. CRAIG

What do you mean?

MISS AUSTEN

Why particularize on Mrs. Frazier?

MRS. CRAIG

Because I don't want her here.

MISS AUSTEN

You don't want anybody here.

MRS. CRAIG

I don't want *her*.

[*She strikes the table with her knuckles.*

MISS AUSTEN (*looking directly at her*)

You don't want your husband — (*Mrs. Craig starts slightly and then stands rigid*) only that he's necessary to the upkeep here. But if you could see how that could be managed without him, his position here wouldn't be as secure as the position of one of those pillows there.

[*She indicates the pillows on the seat at the right of the stairway.*

MRS. CRAIG

Well, I must say, Miss Austen, that's a very nice thing for you to say to me.

MISS AUSTEN

It's the truth, whether you like to hear it or not. You want your house, Harriet, and that's all you do want. And that's all you'll have, at the finish, unless you change your way. People who live to themselves, Harriet, are generally left to themselves; for other people will not go on being made miserable indefinitely for the sake of your ridiculous idolatry of house furnishings.

MRS. CRAIG

You seem to have borne it rather successfully.

MISS AUSTEN

I did it for Walter's sake; because I knew he wanted to have me here; and I didn't want to make it difficult. But I've been practically a recluse in that room of mine upstairs ever since we've been here; just to avoid scratching that holy stairway, or leaving a footprint on one of these sacred rugs. I'm not used to that kind of stu-

pidity. I'm accustomed to *living* in rooms; (*Mr. Craig comes quietly down the stairs and stands on the landing, looking inquiringly from one to the other. Mrs. Craig sees him out of the corner of her eye, and drifts forward to the mirror at the right*) and I think too much of myself to consider their appearance where my comfort is concerned. So I've decided to make a change. Only I want my reasons to be made perfectly clear to Walter before I go — I think I owe it to him; for his own sake as well as mine.

[*Miss Austen becomes aware of Craig's presence on the stairway and turns and looks at him. There is a dead pause. Then she turns away, and Craig comes down into the room and forward at the left of the table.*

CRAIG

What's the matter?

MRS. CRAIG (*turning*)

I haven't the faintest idea, I'm sure. But from what Auntie Austen has just been saying, she seems to think there are quite a few things the matter.

CRAIG

What is it, Auntie?

MRS. CRAIG

She tells me she's going to leave us.

[*He looks at his wife, then at his aunt.*

MISS AUSTEN

It's nothing very new, Walter.

CRAIG (*to his wife*)

Going to leave the house, you mean?

MRS. CRAIG

So she says.

[*He looks at Auntie Austen again.*

CRAIG
You didn't say that, did you, Auntie?
MRS. CRAIG
Haven't I just told you she said it?
MISS AUSTEN
I am leaving to-morrow, Walter.
CRAIG
But, why? What's happened?
MRS. CRAIG
She says she finds my conduct of affairs here unendurable.
MISS AUSTEN
I'll be obliged to you, Harriet, if you'll allow me to explain the reasons for my going; I know them better than you do.
MRS. CRAIG (*turning to the large chair in front of the fireplace and sitting down*)
You haven't any reasons that I can see; except the usual jealous reasons that women have — of the wives of men they've brought up.
MISS AUSTEN
You'll have plenty of time to give your version of my leaving after I've gone.
MRS. CRAIG
Well, sit down, then, and let us hear *your* version of it.
MISS AUSTEN
I prefer to stand, thank you.
MRS. CRAIG
Just as you please.
MISS AUSTEN (*glancing at the chair at the left, below the piano*)
I doubt if I'd know quite *how* to sit in one of these chairs.

CRAIG

Why, what do you mean, Auntie? I can't believe that you've had any difficulty with any one; and especially with Harriet — who thinks the world of you. (*Miss Austen smiles dryly*) Now, you know she does, Auntie. Harriet is just as fond of you as I am. (*Turning to his wife*) Why, it's incredible, positively.

MRS. CRAIG

I'm glad you're here — to hear some of this.

CRAIG

I suppose there *are* little irritations come up around a house occasionally, just as there are in any other business; but I'm sure you're too sensible, Auntie, to allow them to affect you to the extent of making you want to leave the house. Why, what would we do around here without you. It wouldn't seem to me that we had any house at all. What was it you said to Auntie, Harriet?

MRS. CRAIG

I haven't said anything to her, of course; she's simply using her imagination.

CRAIG

Then, it isn't anything that Harriet has said to you, Auntie?

MISS AUSTEN

Oh, no — Harriet never *says* anything. She simply acts; and leaves you to interpret — if you're able. And it takes a long time to be able — until you find the key. And then it's all very simple — and very ridiculous, and incredibly selfish. So much so, Walter, that I rather despair of ever convincing you of my justification for leaving your house.

CRAIG

Well, what has Harriet done, Auntie?

MRS. CRAIG

I'll tell you what I did, Walter — I objected to Auntie Austen's having brought that woman across the street there in here while I was away.

CRAIG

You mean Mrs. Frazier?

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, I mean Mrs. Frazier.

CRAIG

Why, what's the matter with Mrs. Frazier?

MRS. CRAIG

She's a vulgar old busybody, that's what's the matter with her — that's been trying to get in here ever since we've been here.

CRAIG

What do you mean, she's been trying to get *in* here?

MRS. CRAIG

You wouldn't understand if I told you, Walter. It's a form of curiosity that women have about other women's houses that men can't appreciate.

MISS AUSTEN

Harriet is chiefly provoked, Walter, because she has allowed herself to be tempted off form for a moment. She would much prefer to have excluded Mrs. Frazier by the usual method — that has been employed in the exclusion of every other man and woman that has ever visited here. But since she's blundered, she must attempt to justify herself now by arraigning Mrs. Frazier as everything from a vulgarian to a busybody — and

even to insinuating that her visit here this afternoon was inspired by an interest in you.

MRS. CRAIG

I insinuated nothing of the kind. I simply asked a question in answer to an insinuation of yours.

MISS AUSTEN

The details are unimportant, Harriet; I know the principle.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, tell the truth about it, at least.

MISS AUSTEN

That is exactly what I am going to do — even at the risk of Walter's disfavor.

CRAIG

I don't think you could very well incur that, Auntie.

MISS AUSTEN

You're a man, Walter; and you're in love with your wife. And I am perfectly familiar with the usual result of interference under those circumstances.

CRAIG

Well, I hope I'm open to conviction, Auntie, if you have a grievance.

MISS AUSTEN

It isn't my own cause I'm about to plead; it doesn't matter about me. I sha'n't be here. But I don't want to be witness to the undoing of a man that was by way of becoming a very important citizen, without warning him of the danger.

CRAIG

I don't understand what you mean, Auntie.

MISS AUSTEN

That is probably the greater part of the danger, Walter

— that you *don't* understand. If you did it would b
scarcely necessary to warn you.

CRAIG

Of what?

[*There is a pause; and Miss Austen looks right into hi*
*eyes.*

MISS AUSTEN

Your wife.

[*Mrs. Craig breaks into a mirthless laugh, at the absurdit*
*of Miss Austen's implication. Craig turns and looks a*
*her.*

CRAIG

What are you laughing at, Harriet?

MRS. CRAIG

Why, don't you think that's very amusing?

CRAIG

I don't know that I think it's so very amusing.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, wait till you've heard the rest of it; you'll prob-
ably change your mind.

MISS AUSTEN (*looking steadily at Mrs. Craig*)

Harriet isn't really laughing, Walter.

MRS. CRAIG

What *am* I doing, crying?

MISS AUSTEN

You are whistling in the dark.

MRS. CRAIG (*vastly amused, and rising*)

Oh, dear!

[*She touches her hair before the mirror.*

MISS AUSTEN

You're terrified that your secret has been discovered.

[*Mrs. Craig turns sharply and faces her.*

MRS. CRAIG
Really? And what *is* my secret?

MISS AUSTEN
I think it's hardly necessary to tell you that, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG
But, I'm interested in hearing it.

MISS AUSTEN
Well, you can listen while I tell it to Walter.

MRS. CRAIG
Very well.

MISS AUSTEN
But, I want you to know before I tell him that it didn't remain for your outburst against Mrs. Frazier here a few minutes ago to reveal it to me; I knew it almost as soon as Walter's mother knew it.

[*There is a pause: then Mrs. Craig moves a few steps towards her husband.*

MRS. CRAIG (*with a touch of mock mysteriousness*)
She means that I've been trying to poison you, secretly, Walter.

MISS AUSTEN
Not so secretly, either, Harriet.

[*Mrs. Craig laughs lightly.*

MRS. CRAIG (*going up towards the portières*)
Well, I'm sorry I must go, for I'm sure this is going to be very amusing.

MISS AUSTEN
I've asked Harriet to stay here, Walter.

[*Mrs. Craig turns sharply at the portières.*

MRS. CRAIG
Well, I don't intend to stay.

MISS AUSTEN
I didn't think you would.

CRAIG
Why not, Harriet?

MRS. CRAIG
Because I have something more important to do than listen to a lot of absurdities.

MISS AUSTEN
Then I shall have to regard your going as an admission of the truth of those absurdities.

MRS. CRAIG
Well, you may regard it as you please: only I hope when you've finished discussing me, you'll be as frank in letting Walter know something of what *I've* been putting up with during the past two years.

[*She goes out through the portières.*

MISS AUSTEN
Playing the martyr as usual. (*Craig takes a step or two towards the portières, and they stand for a second looking after her. Then he turns and looks at his aunt*) I could have almost spoken those last words *for* her, Walter; I know her so well.

CRAIG (*coming down to the front of the table*)
I wish you'd tell me what's happened here, Auntie.

MISS AUSTEN (*crossing to him*)
That isn't so easy to tell to a man, Walter; it requires a bit of elucidation.

CRAIG
What is it?

MISS AUSTEN
Walter — why do you suppose your mother asked you to promise her, when she was dying, that you'd take me with you when you married?

CRAIG

Why, I think that was a perfectly natural request, Auntie, considering what you'd been to both of us during her illness.

MISS AUSTEN

But, it wasn't as though I should *need* a home — for she knew I preferred to travel, — that that's what I was preparing to do when she was first stricken. And I never told you, Walter, but she asked *me* to promise her that I should accept your invitation when you made it. You see, she knew her woman, Walter, — the woman you were going to marry.

CRAIG

You mean that Mother didn't like Harriet?

MISS AUSTEN

Nobody could like Harriet, Walter; she doesn't want them to.

CRAIG

I like her.

MISS AUSTEN

You're blinded by a pretty face, son, as many another man has been blinded.

CRAIG

Well, what has Harriet done?

MISS AUSTEN

She's left *you* practically friendless, for one thing; because the visits of your friends imply an importance to you that is at variance with her plan: so she's made it perfectly clear to them, by a thousand little gestures, that they are not welcome in her house. Because this *is* her house, you know, Walter; it isn't yours — don't make any mistake about that. This house is what

Harriet married — she didn't marry you. You simply went with the house — as a more or less regrettable necessity. And you must not obtrude; for she wants the house all to herself. So she has set about reducing you to as negligible a factor as possible in the scheme of things here.

CRAIG

You don't really believe that, Auntie, do you?

MISS AUSTEN

That is her plan concerning you, Walter, I'm telling you. That is why the visits of your friends have been discouraged.

CRAIG

I can't think that Harriet would discourage my friends, Auntie.

MISS AUSTEN

Does any of them come here?

CRAIG

Why, most of them have been here at one time or another, yes.

MISS AUSTEN

Not within the last eighteen months; and you've only been married two years.

CRAIG

Well, why shouldn't Harriet want my friends here?

MISS AUSTEN

For the same reason that she doesn't want anybody else here. Because she's a supremely selfish woman; and with the arrogance of the selfish mind, she wants to exclude the whole world — because she cannot impose her narrow little order upon it. And these four walls are the symbol of that selfish exclusion.

CRAIG (*turning away, and crossing towards the right*)
I can't believe that, Auntie.

MISS AUSTEN (*extending her arms towards the front door*)
Can you remember when any one has darkened that door — until here to-day, when Mrs. Frazier came over? — And you see the result of that. And why do you suppose that people have so suddenly *stopped* visiting you? They always visited you at home. It can hardly be that you've changed so radically in two years. And I daresay all those charming young men and women that used to have such pleasant times at home, thought that when you married your house would be quite a rendezvous. But they reckoned without their — hostess, Walter — just as they are beginning to reckon without you. (*He turns and looks at her*) You never go out any more. — Nobody ever asks you. — They're afraid you might bring her; and they don't want her. — Because she's made it perfectly clear to them that she doesn't want *them*. (*Craig turns away again slowly*) And just as your friends are beginning to reckon without you in their social life, so it is only a question of time till they begin to reckon without you in their *business* life. (*He looks at her again, and she moves across towards him*) Walter — why do you suppose your appointment as one of the directors of the local bank never materialized?

CRAIG
Why, I think Littlefield had something to do with that; he's been high-hatting me a bit lately.

MISS AUSTEN
Because Harriet insulted his wife here; I saw her do it.

CRAIG
When?

MISS AUSTEN

The week after New Year's, when Mrs. Littlefiel called.

CRAIG

What did Harriet do?

MISS AUSTEN

Nothing — what Harriet always does. It was a littl feline subtlety — that would sound too incredible i the ears of a man. But Mrs. Littlefield appreciated it for all her stupidity. I *saw* her appreciate it — an you were not appointed. (*Craig looks away*) And want to tell you something else that I saw the othe day in the city, or rather heard. I was having luncheo at the Colonnade, and two of your old Thursday-nigh poker crowd came in, and sat at a table within hearin distance of me. And presently a man and his wife cam in and sat down at another table. And the wife imme diately proceeded to tell the man how he should have sa down; and how he should sit now that he *was* down, an so on. And I distinctly heard one of your friends sa to the other, "Listen to Craig's wife over here." (*Crai turns his head and looks right into Miss Austen's eyes There is a slight pause. Then he crosses in front of her and continues over to the piano at the left. She move towards the left also, going up above the table*) That is a little straw, Walter, that should show you the way th wind is blowing. Your friends resent being told where they shall sit, and how; so they are avoiding the occa sion of it — just as I am going to avoid it. But yo cannot avoid it, so you must deal with it.

CRAIG

How? How should I deal with it?

MISS AUSTEN (*taking hold of the back of the chair at the left of the table*)

By impressing your wife with the realization that there is a *man* of the house here, as well as a woman; and that *you* are that man. And if you don't, Walter, you are going to go the way of every other man that has ever allowed himself to be dominated by a selfish woman. — Become a pallid little echo of her distorted opinions; believing finally that every friend you ever had before you met her was trying to lead you into perdition — and that she rescued you, and made a man of you. (*She makes a little sound of bitter amusement, and turns away towards the foot of the stairs*) The irony of it. And yet they can do it.

CRAIG (*crossing back towards the right*)

Harriet could never turn me against my friends.

MISS AUSTEN (*turning at the foot of the stairs, and speaking with level conviction*)

Walter — they can make men believe that the mothers that nursed them — are their arch enemies. (*She comes forward suddenly and rests her left hand on the table*) That's why I'm warning you. For you're fighting for the life of your manhood, Walter; and I cannot in conscience leave this house without at least turning on the light here, and letting you see what it is that you're fighting against.

[*She starts for the stairs, and Craig turns suddenly and follows her.*

CRAIG

Auntie, I can't see you leave this house!

MISS AUSTEN (*stopping on the second step*)

But, if I'm not happy here.

CRAIG

Well, why have I been so blind that I haven't seen th
you were not happy, and fixed it so that you wou
be!

MISS AUSTEN (*quietly*)

Because you haven't *seen* your wife, Walter.

CRAIG

Oh, I can't be convinced that there isn't an enormou
element of misunderstanding between you and Harrie
(*Miss Austen closes her eyes and shakes her head from sid
to side*) Oh, I'm not disputing that she has a peculia
disposition — she may be all that you say of her; —
but I really can't see the necessity of your leaving th
house; the thing must be susceptible of some sort o
adjustment.

[*Miss Austen lays her right hand on his shoulder.*

MISS AUSTEN

No house is big enough, Walter, for two women who ar
interested in the same man.

CRAIG (*crossing over to the left*)

I'll never have a minute's peace if you leave here; I'l
reproach myself.

MISS AUSTEN

You have nothing to reproach yourself with, Walter;
you've always been very kind and very good to me.

CRAIG

What will you do if you leave here?

MISS AUSTEN

What I've always wanted to do — travel — all over the
world — far and wide: so that I shan't become — little.
I have such a deadly fear of that after these past two
years.

CRAIG

But, I promised Mother that you'd always have a home with me, and if you go, I'll feel somehow that I'm breaking that promise.

MISS AUSTEN

You haven't a home to offer me, Walter. (*He looks at her*) You have a house — with furniture in it — that can only be used under highly specified conditions. I have the impression somehow or other, when I look at these rooms — that they are rooms that have died — and are laid out.

[*She turns and starts up the stairs.*

CRAIG

Well, whatever they are, they'll seem less if you leave them. I don't think I'd feel worse if it were Mother herself that were leaving.

[*Miss Austen turns, with her hand on the balustrade.*

MISS AUSTEN

Be glad that it isn't your mother, Walter; she would have left long ago.

[*She goes on up the stairs, and he stands looking after her. There is a ring at the front door. He turns and looks out through the French windows, then moves to the middle of the room and looks out through the portières. The bell rings again; then Mazie comes down the stairs.*

CRAIG

There's a little boy at the front door, Mazie.

MAZIE

Yes, sir, I heard the bell.

CRAIG

I'm expecting a gentleman, too, Mazie, in a few minutes; I'll be upstairs.

MAZIE

All right, Mr. Craig, I'll call you when he comes.

[*Mazie goes out to answer the bell, and Craig goes up th stairs. He stops halfway up and thinks.*

BOY'S VOICE (*at the front door*)

Why, Christine, up at the corner, sez if you're goin' t the Society to-night, would you mind payin' her dues fo her; she sez she can't go to-night.

[*Craig disappears.*

MAZIE

Oh, sure, tell her I'll be glad to.

BOY'S VOICE

She sez the card's in the envelope there with th money.

[*Mrs. Harold comes in through the portières and crosses towards the door, looking out keenly.*

MAZIE

All right, dear, tell her I'll tend to it.

[*The screen door slams and Mazie comes in.*

MRS. HAROLD

Did you answer that door, Mazie?

MAZIE (*crossing below the table to the mantelpiece*)

Yes, it was the tailor's little boy, up at the corner, with Christine's Society money. He sez Christine can't go to-night.

MRS. HAROLD

Is to-night Society night again already?

MAZIE (*putting an envelope back of the center ornament on the mantelpiece*)

It's the third Friday.

MRS. HAROLD

I can never keep track of that old Society.

MAZIE
Do you want me to pay your dues for you?

MRS. HAROLD (*moving to the foot of the stairs*)
No, dear, I'm paid up to the first of July. (*Mazie turns from the mantelpiece and moves towards her*) Where did Mr. Craig go — upstairs?

MAZIE
I guess so, unless he's out there somewhere.

MRS. HAROLD (*glancing towards the front porch, and taking a step or two towards Mazie*)
No, he's not out there.

MAZIE
Why, what's the matter?

MRS. HAROLD (*laying her hand on Mazie's arm, and lowering her voice*)
I think the old lady's goin' to leave.
[*She tiptoes to the portières, Mazie watching her.*

MAZIE
Miss Austen?
[*Mrs. Harold nods; and then looks out through the adjoining rooms.*

MRS. HAROLD (*turning to Mazie*)
The lady made a row about Mrs. Frazier being here.
[*She looks out again.*

MAZIE
Did she?

MRS. HAROLD (*coming back*)
She was furious. I knew it was coming by the face on her when she told me to take the roses out of the room. So as soon as I heard Mrs. Frazier goin', I went right up to the library; you can hear every word up there, you know, over near the radiator.

MAZIE

Yes, I know you can. Was *he* here?

MRS. HAROLD

He wasn't at first, but I think he must have come down while they were at it. I heard *her* say she didn't want her house made a thoroughfare for the neighborhood.

MAZIE

Can you imagine it — as though anybody ever came *in* here.

MRS. HAROLD

That's what *I* felt like sayin'. But Miss Austen told her.

MAZIE

Did she?

MRS. HAROLD

I should say she did. It didn't take Mrs. Craig long to get out of the room once Miss Austen got started.

[*A door closes upstairs, and Mazie darts to the center table and settles the table scarf. Mrs. Harold steps to the big chair in front of the mantelpiece and feigns to be occupied in setting it straight. Mazie glances over her right shoulder up the stairs, then steps up to the foot of the stairs and glances up. Then she hurries forward to Mrs. Harold again, glancing through the portières as she goes.*

MAZIE

What did Mrs. Craig do, walk out of the room?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes. She said she had something else to do besides listenin' to a lot of silly talk. (*Mazie raises her eyes to heaven*) I felt like sayin' I'd like to know what it was she had to do.

MAZIE

So would I.

MRS. HAROLD

I've been here nearly a year now, and *I* have my first time to see her do anything — only a lot of snoopin' — after somebody else has finished.

MAZIE

It's too bad Miss Austen didn't tell her that while she was at it.

MRS. HAROLD (*raising her hand, with a touch of solemnity*) She told her enough.

[*She goes up to the foot of the stairs and looks up.*

MAZIE

Well, didn't *he* say anything?

MRS. HAROLD

Not very much; Miss Austen done most of the talkin'. (*She comes down to Mazie's left, confidentially*) She told him if he didn't do something very soon, his wife 'ud make him look like an echo.

MAZIE

She will, too.

MRS. HAROLD

He said she had a peculiar disposition — and that Miss Austen didn't understand her. Well, I felt like sayin' if Miss Austen don't understand her, I do. And I'd soon tell her how well I understand her, too, only that she gives me a wide berth.

MAZIE

I feel kind of sorry for him sometimes, though.

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, it's a pity for *him*. (*Lowering her voice, and speaking with great conviction*) She could build a nest in his ear, and he'd never know it.

[*She turns to the table and settles the various ornaments.*

MAZIE

She certainly is the hardest woman to please that I ever worked for.

MRS. HAROLD

Well, I don't know whether she's hard to please or n Mazie, for I've never tried to please her. I do my wo and if she don't like it she has a tongue in her hea she can soon tell me, and I can go somewhere el I've worked in too many houses to be out of a pla very long. (*Straightening up and resting her left ha on the table*) Did I tell you about her wanting me dust the leaves off that little tree in front of the dinin room window last week?

MAZIE

Dust the leaves?

MRS. HAROLD (*looking to heaven for witness*)

That's the honest God's fact. And me with the rheum tism at the time.

MAZIE

Can you imagine such a thing?

MRS. HAROLD

Well, you know how I done it, don't you?

MAZIE

What'd you say to her?

MRS. HAROLD

I told her right up; I said, "I'll dust no tree for nobody

MAZIE

You done right.

MRS. HAROLD

She sez, "You mean you refuse to dust it?" — "Yes, I sez, "I refuse, and," I sez, "what's more, I'm goi to stay refuse." "Well," she sez, "it needs dustin

whether you dust it or not." "Well," I sez, "let it need it," I sez. I sez, "A little dust won't poison it." I sez, "We'll be dust ourselves some day, unless we get drownded."

[*She goes to the portières.*

MAZIE

You done right.

MRS. HAROLD

Oh, I told her.

[*She glances out through the rooms.*

MAZIE

I think the worst kind of a woman a girl can work for is one that's crazy about her house.

MRS. HAROLD

I do, too; because I think they *are* crazy half the time. You know, you can go crazy over a house, Mazie, the same as you can over anything else.

MAZIE

Sure you can.

MRS. HAROLD

Doctor Nicholson's wife was one of them; although she wasn't as generous a woman as this one.

MAZIE

No, that's one thing you've got to say for Mrs. Craig; she's not stingy.

MRS. HAROLD

No, that's true, she isn't.

MAZIE

I don't think I've ever worked in a house where there was as good a table for the help.

MRS. HAROLD

That's right; you always get whatever they get.

MAZIE

And you never have to ask for your wages, neither.

[*The doorbell rings.*

MRS. HAROLD

No, she's very good that way.

MAZIE (*going to answer the door, settling her cap and apron*

I guess that's that gentleman Mr. Craig's expectin'.

MRS. HAROLD

Come out when you come in, Mazie.

[*She goes out through the portières. Mr. Craig comes dow the stairs.*

BIRKMIRE (*at the front door*)

Good evening. Is Mr. Craig in?

MAZIE

Yes, sir, he's in.

[*The screen door is heard to close, and Birkmire enters.*

CRAIG (*coming in*)

Hello, Billy, how are you?

BIRKMIRE (*shaking hands earnestly*)

Hello, Walt.

[*He looks right into Craig's eyes.*

CRAIG

I called your house a little while ago; (*Birkmire turn to the piano with his raincoat and hat*) there was a messag here for me when I got in, saying you'd called.

[*Mazie comes in and crosses towards the portières.*

BIRKMIRE

Yes, I've been trying to get hold of you since four o'clock

CRAIG

Let me take those things out of your way.

[*Mazie stops near the portières and looks back, to see i they want her to take Birkmire's things.*

BIRKMIRE

No, thanks, Walter, I've got to get right back to the house.

[*Mazie goes out; and Craig moves down towards the table.*

CRAIG

Your father still here?

BIRKMIRE

Yes, he'll be here for a day or two yet.

[*He looks keenly out through the portières, stepping up towards the back of the room.*

CRAIG (*watching him curiously*)

What's the matter? (*Birkmire makes a deft gesture, signifying that Mazie may be within hearing distance*) What is it?

BIRKMIRE (*stepping down close to Craig and laying his hand on his sleeve*)

What about it, Walt?

CRAIG

About what?

BIRKMIRE

About Fergus and his wife. You were out there last night, weren't you?

CRAIG

Sure. That's where I talked to *you* from.

BIRKMIRE

Well, my God, what happened out there, Walter?

CRAIG

What do you mean?

BIRKMIRE

Haven't you seen the evening papers?

CRAIG

Not yet, no. Why?

BIRKMIRE (*smothering an exclamation, and stepping to th piano to get a newspaper out of his pocket*)
Jesus, how did you miss it!

CRAIG
Why, what's happened?

BIRKMIRE
Fergus and his wife are dead.

CRAIG
What!

BIRKMIRE
Found them this morning in the library.

CRAIG
Passmore, you mean?

BIRKMIRE (*handing him the paper*)
Here it is on the front page of the *Telegraph*.

CRAIG (*crossing down to the right*)
What are you saying, Billy?

BIRKMIRE (*stepping over towards the portières and looking out*
It's in every paper in town.

CRAIG
Where is it?

BIRKMIRE (*coming forward at Craig's left and indicating certain headline*)
Fergus Passmore and wife found dead in library.

CRAIG
My God!

BIRKMIRE
I happened to see it over a man's shoulder coming down in the elevator in the Land Title Building about four o'clock, and I damned near had heart failure. (*He turns away to the left and takes a cigarette from a case*) I've been trying to get you on the 'phone ever since

And I saw *her* myself at the Ritz last night at twelve o'clock. I was talking to her. I took the old man over there for a bit of supper after the show, and she was there with that military gent she's been stepping it with lately. (*Suddenly laying his hand on Craig's arm*) That's my hunch on this thing, Walter. I think she's been playing this soldier fellow a little too much lately and Fergus has heard of it and probably called it when she got in last night, and busted up the show. You know, he was always jealous as hell of her.

[*He takes a step or two towards the back and glances through the portières.*

CRAIG

There must be a catch in this thing somewhere, Billy.

BIRKMIRE (*coming forward again*)

How could there be a catch in it, Walter? Do you think they'd print that kind of stuff for a joke.

CRAIG

Well, my God, I was out there last night till twelve o'clock.

BIRKMIRE (*tearing the cigarette between his fingers*)

Well, evidently this thing happened after you got away from there. Did she get in before you left there last night?

CRAIG (*looking up from the paper*)

What?

BIRKMIRE

I say, did Adelaide get in last night before you left out there?

CRAIG

No, but she was there when I got out there, about nine o'clock. She was going out somewhere.

BIRKMIRE

Yes, and I know who it was she was going out *with*, too; that's the third time I've run into her with that bird lately. And I want to find out what his name is right away quick, too, for he might be in on this thing.

CRAIG

Have you been out there yet?

BIRKMIRE

Out to Fergus', you mean?

CRAIG

Yes.

BIRKMIRE

Sure, I hopped right out there as soon as I read it; but you can't get near the place.

CRAIG

I think I ought to get in touch with Police Headquarters right away, Billy.

BIRKMIRE

Well, that's why I wanted to get hold of you. It says there they're looking for a man seen leaving the house after midnight.

CRAIG

Sure, that's me.

BIRKMIRE

Well, not necessarily you, Walter.

CRAIG

That's the time I got away from there.

BIRKMIRE

That doesn't mean anything. Only I think it 'ud be a good thing to let them know right away.

CRAIG (*turning suddenly and going up to the telephone*)

Sure, I'll call up right away.

BIRKMIRE (*following him up*)

Well, now, wait a minute, Walter, don't move too fast; you know a thing like this can take a thousand and one turns, and we don't want to make any false move. This kind of thing 'ud be pie for the newspapers, you know; and the fact that we were invited out there to play cards wouldn't read any too well.

CRAIG

Well, *you* weren't out there.

BIRKMIRE

I know that; but I'm not sitting back in the corner in this thing, you know, Walter. It just so happened that I *wasn't* out there. But I talked to you on the telephone out there last night, from my house, and in a thing of this kind they trace telephone calls and everything else.

CRAIG (*looking at the paper again*)

My God, this is a terrible thing, though, isn't it, Billy.

BIRKMIRE (*turning away to the left, and passing his hand across his brow*)

I haven't got it myself yet.

CRAIG

Terrible.

BIRKMIRE

It'll be a jar to your wife when she hears it, won't it?

CRAIG

Awful.

BIRKMIRE

She'll very likely see it in the paper up there in Albany.

CRAIG

She's back from Albany.

BIRKMIRE

Is she?

CRAIG

She got in a while ago.

BIRKMIRE

Well, she doesn't know anything about this yet, does she?

CRAIG

I don't think so; unless she happened to see the paper I brought home. I suppose it's in it.

BIRKMIRE

Sure, it's in all of them.

CRAIG

I just took it from the boy and put it in my pocket.

BIRKMIRE

Where is Harriet?

CRAIG

She's upstairs.

BIRKMIRE (*lowering his voice*)

Does she know you were out there last night?

CRAIG

I don't know, I guess she does. Yes, I think I mentioned it a while ago.

BIRKMIRE (*stepping to Craig's side, and laying his hand on his arm*)

Well, now, listen, Walter — If she doesn't happen to see the paper, what she doesn't know won't bother her. And this thing is apt to clear itself up over night. It might be cleared up now, for all we know; for I suppose the police have been working on it all day. But, I think the wise move for us is just to hop out there and try to find out what's going on; and if they haven't found anything out yet, just get in touch with Police Headquarters and let them know where we're at.

CRAIG (*tossing the newspaper on to the seat beside the telephone table*)

Yes, let's do that. Wait till I get my hat.

[*He goes through the portières.*

BIRKMIRE (*crossing to the piano for his things*)

I've got my car out here; we can cut across the park and be out there in ten minutes.

[*He throws his raincoat across his arm, picks up his hat, and steps quickly across to get the newspaper that Craig left on the seat. He glances up the stairs and out through the portières. Then he sees Craig coming through the adjoining room, and starts for the front door.*

CRAIG (*entering, wearing his hat, and carrying the newspaper he brought home*)

I'll take this paper with me; keep it out of sight.

BIRKMIRE

I've got the other one here in my pocket.

[*Birkmire goes out.*

CRAIG (*glancing about the room as he crosses to the front door*)

We take the *Globe* here in the afternoon, but I don't see it anywhere around out there.

[*He goes out.*

BIRKMIRE (*outside*)

I've got the car right out here.

CRAIG (*outside*)

I guess across the park will be the quickest.

BIRKMIRE

Yes, we can be over there in ten minutes.

[*There is a dead pause. Then a clock somewhere out at the right strikes half-past six, with a soft gong. There is another slight pause, and then Mrs. Craig sweeps through the portières, carrying an open newspaper. She sees*

*that no one is in the room, and rushes to the forward window to see if she can see Mr. Craig anywhere about. Then she starts for the front door, but changes her mind and rushes up to the landing of the stairway.*

MRS. CRAIG (*calling up the stairs*)

Walter! — Walter! — Are you up there, Walter? (*She hurries down into the room again and over to the portières*) Mazie! — Mazie!

[*She runs across to the front door and out. Mazie comes in through the portières and looks about, then starts towards the front door. Mrs. Craig hurries in again.*

MAZIE

Were you calling me, Mrs. Craig?

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, Mazie. Have you seen anything of Mr. Craig?

MAZIE

Why, he was here a few minutes ago, Mrs. Craig, with a gentleman.

MRS. CRAIG

What gentleman? Who was he?

MAZIE

I don't know who he was, Mrs. Craig; I never saw him before.

MRS. CRAIG

Didn't you catch his name?

MAZIE

No, Ma'm, I didn't. He came in an automobile.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, did Mr. Craig go away with him?

MAZIE

I don't know whether he did or not, Mrs. Craig. I didn't know he'd gone.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning Mazie around quickly by the shoulder and urging her towards the portières*)

See if Mr. Craig's hat's on the rack out there.

MAZIE (*hurrying out*)

Isn't he up in his room?

MRS. CRAIG

No, he isn't. (*She turns breathlessly and looks towards the bay window at the left*) Oh, Lord! (*Turning to the portières again*) Is it?

MAZIE (*from somewhere out at the right*)

No, Ma'm, it isn't.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, listen, Mazie, run over to the garage there and see if he's there! No, no, come this way, it's quicker. (*She waits frantically until Mazie rushes through the portières and across towards the front door*) And if he's there tell him to come over here immediately; I want to see him.

MAZIE

Yes, Ma'm.

[*The screen door slams after her, and she hurries past the bay window at the left.*

MRS. CRAIG

Hurry now, Mazie. Tell him I want him right away. (*She turns in the door and leans against the jamb, looking straight out, wide-eyed, and holding the newspaper against her bosom*) Oh, my God! (*She hurries across above the center table and down to the window, forward, at the right*) Oh, my God!

[*She stands looking eagerly through the window, toward the left, as though watching Mazie running down the street.*

THE CURTAIN DESCENDS SLOWLY

## ACT II

*Ten Minutes Later*

*Mrs. Craig is standing at the window, forward, reading the newspaper. She stops reading, glances out the window, and then moves with a kind of controlled desperation to the bay window at the left, where she looks out again eagerly. Mrs. Harold comes in from the right.*

MRS. HAROLD

Is Mazie here, Mrs. Craig?

[*Mrs. Craig turns nervously.*

MRS. CRAIG

No, she isn't, Mrs. Harold; I've sent her on an errand; she'll be back in a minute.

MRS. HAROLD (*turning to go out again*)

I told her I thought I heard you calling her.

[*Telephone bell rings.*

MRS. CRAIG

See who that is, Mrs. Harold, will you, please.

[*Mrs. Harold comes back and picks up the telephone.*

MRS. HAROLD

Hello? — Hello?

MRS. CRAIG

What's the matter; don't they answer?

MRS. HAROLD

No, Ma'm, they haven't answered yet. Hello!

MRS. CRAIG (*turning to the window again*)

Never mind it, Mrs. Harold; it's probably a mistake.

MRS. HAROLD (*hanging up the receiver*)
It does that sometimes when it's a long-distance call. [*Mrs. Craig turns sharply.*

MRS. CRAIG
They didn't say it was long distance, did they?

MRS. HAROLD
No, Ma'm, they didn't say anything; nobody answered at all.

MRS. CRAIG
Well, if they want us they'll ring again.

MRS. HAROLD
Will you tell Mazie I want her when she comes in, Mrs. Craig, please?

MRS. CRAIG
Yes, I'll send her out to you as soon as she comes back. (*Mrs. Harold goes out through the portières, and Mrs. Craig crosses over and down to the window, forward, and looks out. She sees Mazie hurrying back from the garage, and steps quickly up to the door at the left. Mazie can be seen running past the bay window. The screen door slams, and Mazie rushes in*) Isn't he over there, Mazie?

MAZIE
No, Ma'm, he isn't.

MRS. CRAIG
Are you sure?

MAZIE
Yes, Ma'm, I looked all around.

MRS. CRAIG
Did you go round to the back?

MAZIE
Yes, Ma'm, I looked everywhere. Old Mr. Foster was

standin' over there; I ast him if he'd seen anything of Mr. Craig, but he said he hadn't.

MRS. CRAIG

Is the garage locked?

MAZIE

Yes, Ma'm, I tried the door.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, could you see whether or not the car was in there?

MAZIE

Yes, Ma'm, they're both in there, the little one, too; I looked through the glass. (*Mrs. Craig turns away to the right, with a troubled expression, and moves down towards the mirror, and Mazie moves towards the door at the right. Mrs. Craig glances out the window, forward*) I guess maybe he musta went away with that gentleman that was here.

MRS. CRAIG

He probably did. You say that gentleman came in a car, Mazie?

MAZIE

Yes, Ma'm, I think it was his; it was standin' right in front of the house when I opened the door for him.

MRS. CRAIG

All right, Mazie. Mrs. Harold wants you for something.

MAZIE (*going out*)

Oh, does she?

[*Mrs. Craig leans against the mantelpiece and thinks hard. The telephone bell rings. She turns and looks at the telephone; it rings again. Then she moves to answer it. Mazie comes in.*

MRS. CRAIG

I'll answer it, Mazie.

MAZIE
Oh, all right.
[*She withdraws, and Mrs. Craig picks up the telephone.*
MRS. CRAIG (*in a subdued voice*)
Mazie.
MAZIE
Yes, Ma'm?
MRS. CRAIG
Come here for a minute. (*Mazie appears between the portières*) Go up and see that Miss Landreth's door is closed.
MAZIE (*withdrawing*)
Yes, Ma'm.
MRS. CRAIG
Be very quiet about it, now, Mazie, and don't disturb her if she's asleep.
MAZIE
All right.
[*Telephone bell rings again.*
MRS. CRAIG
Hello? — Yes? — All right. (*She glances up the stairs, and then waits*) Hello? — Yes — (*In a louder voice*) Hello! Yes — this is *Mrs.* Craig at the telephone — Mr. Craig isn't here just now, if you wanted *Mr.* Craig. Oh — why-a- Miss Landreth is lying down just now. Who is this speaking, please? — Oh, I see. Why — not a thing in the world, Mr. Fredericks, except that she's very tired — We've only just now gotten in from Albany, and I suggested that she go upstairs and lie down for a while. Yes — Am I going to do what? No, I didn't understand what you said, Mr. Fredericks.

Why, yes, of course, I'd go back with her if anything unforeseen developed — otherwise she can go back herself. We're simply waiting now to hear something from her mother's physician up there. — Yes, of course I'm sure. Why, why should you put yourself to that trouble, Mr. Fredericks? — There wouldn't be anything you could do when you get here. — Well, I'd much rather not call her, if you don't mind, Mr. Fredericks; she's lying down. — Well, can't you tell me what it is you want to tell her — and I can give her the message? Well, probably it would, Mr. Fredericks; — it's very nice of you to be so solicitous about her, but I don't care to disturb her just now. I'm very sorry.

[*She hangs up abruptly, and glances toward the head of the stairs. Mazie appears between the portières.*

MAZIE

The door was closed, Mrs. Craig.

MRS. CRAIG

All right, Mazie. (*Mazie withdraws, and Mrs. Craig moves forward, thoughtfully. There is a tap at the front door bell. Mazie turns and crosses to answer the door. Mrs. Craig is looking sharply toward the front door*) See what those gentlemen want, Mazie.

MAZIE

Yes, Ma'm.

CATELLE (*at the front door*)

Mr. Craig in?

MAZIE

No, sir, he's not in just now; he went out about twenty minutes ago.

CATELLE

What time do you expect him back?

MAZIE

Why, I couldn't say for certain; but I guess he'll be back in time for dinner, about seven o'clock.

CATELLE

Is his wife in?

MAZIE

Yes, sir, she's in.

CATELLE

I'd like to speak to her for a minute if I could.

[*Mrs. Craig, who has been standing very still, listening, vanishes through the portières, looking over her shoulder apprehensively towards the front door.*

MAZIE

Yes, sir. Will you just step in? (*The screen door closes; and immediately Mazie hurries into the room*) If you'll just take a chair for a minute I'll call her.

[*Catelle wanders in, removing his hat, followed by Harry, who also removes his hat as he enters. Catelle moves down to the center table, puts his hat down, and takes a small leather notebook from his inside pocket; and Harry comes forward and sits in the chair beside the piano. There is a pause.*

HARRY

They didn't get this place with a pound of tea.

CATELLE

A lot of money. Phoenix Fire Insurance people. This lad's old man used to be the president of the Company. Died about twelve years ago. I guess this gent's in line for the old man's job, if he lives.

[*Mrs. Craig enters through the portières. Harry rises, and Catelle turns to her.*

MRS. CRAIG

Good evening.

HARRY
Good evening.

CATELLE
Good evening, Ma'm. I called to see Mr. Craig.

MRS. CRAIG
Mr. Craig isn't in just now, I'm sorry.

CATELLE
Are you Mrs. Craig?

MRS. CRAIG
Yes.

CATELLE
Have you any idea what time Mr. Craig'll *be* in?

MRS. CRAIG
Why, I'm expecting him any minute; he was here less than a half-hour ago, when I went upstairs; so he must be right here in the neighborhood somewhere.

CATELLE (*consulting his watch*)
I see.

MRS. CRAIG
He'll certainly be back for his dinner, at seven o'clock, if you'd care to call back.

CATELLE
Well, I've got to be over the other side of town at seven o'clock, — so it may be that you could give me the information I am looking for, as well as Mr. Craig. Would you sit down for a minute?

MRS. CRAIG
Yes, certainly.

[*She turns to the chair in front of the mantelpiece and sits down. Harry resumes his chair beside the piano, and Catelle sits on the small bench immediately above the center table.*

CATELLE

I thought I'd like to speak to *Mr.* Craig first, but I don't suppose it makes a great deal of difference.

MRS. CRAIG

I thought he might be over at the garage — I wanted him myself a few minutes ago; but the maid says he isn't over there.

CATELLE

Well, I'll tell you what it is I wanted to see him about, Mrs. Craig. I suppose you've seen in the evening paper about this unfortunate affair out here on Willows Avenue?

MRS. CRAIG

You mean that shooting affair?

CATELLE

Yes, at the Passmore home.

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, isn't that a dreadful thing! — I've just been reading it here.

CATELLE

Yes, it's a very sad affair.

MRS. CRAIG

They're *both* dead, aren't they?

CATELLE

Yes, they're both dead.

MRS. CRAIG

Isn't that terrible. That's what I wanted to see my husband for; I wanted to ask him if he knew that man.

CATELLE

He probably did; they're pretty well known people here in town.

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, they must be, according to the paper. I haven't had a chance to read it all yet, I've just gotten in from Albany.

CATELLE

It's a rather peculiar case.

MRS. CRAIG

Was it a robbery or something?

CATELLE

No, there wasn't anything taken. Of course, it could have been a foiled *attempt* at robbery, but that 'ud hardly explain certain other circumstances.

MRS. CRAIG

Are you gentlemen working on the case?

CATELLE

Yes, Ma'm, we're from Police Headquarters. But, that doesn't need to alarm *you*, Mrs. Craig; there's no particular connection between that and our visit *here*.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, I'm very glad to know that.

CATELLE

No, this Passmore affair looks to me pretty clearly a matter of jealousy motive. Of course, there are one or two attendant circumstances, as there usually are in cases of this kind, but they don't mean anything, as far as the actual shooting is concerned. There was a man seen leaving the house shortly after midnight in an automobile — One of the neighbors happened to see him; but it was too dark to establish any identification. Besides, that wouldn't account for the death of *Mrs.* Passmore; because she didn't get in until after three o'clock, and the man left there between twelve and one.

MRS. CRAIG

I see.

CATELLE

But, of course, as you understand, Mrs. Craig, it's part of our business to follow up any little outside clue that we happen to get hold of that might throw some additional light on a case.

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, of course.

CATELLE

And that's what I wanted to see Mr. Craig about.

MRS. CRAIG

You mean you think Mr. Craig might be the man that was seen leaving there last night.

CATELLE

No, that circumstance is really not being seriously considered; a house of that description might have had any number of visitors during the evening.

MRS. CRAIG

That's very true.

CATELLE

But, we've had a report late this afternoon, Mrs. Craig, from the Lynnebrooke Telephone Exchange, where your light comes in, that there was a call made on your telephone here at five-twenty-seven this evening, asking for the address of the telephone number Levering three, one hundred; and that happens to be the number of the telephone at Mr. Passmore's home.

MRS. CRAIG

You mean that somebody called from here?

[*She indicates the telephone.*

CATELLE

On this telephone, yes, Ma'm. Oakdale, six, two, three. That's the number of your telephone here, isn't it?

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, that's our number.

CATELLE

That's what I've got here.

MRS. CRAIG

But I can't imagine who it would be that called.

CATELLE

The report says it was a woman's voice.

MRS. CRAIG

Who was it that reported it, do you know?

CATELLE

I couldn't tell you that, Mrs. Craig.

MRS. CRAIG

I mean to say, would it be possible that the person who reported it could have made a mistake in the number?

CATELLE

No, they're usually pretty careful in an affair of this kind.

MRS. CRAIG

And the call was made at five o'clock this evening, you say?

CATELLE

Five-twenty-seven, my report says. The operator didn't give the address, of course; it's against the telephone company's rules. And the party rang off.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, that's extraordinary. Although it might have been one of the servants — probably saw it in the even-

ing paper and was curious to know where it was. (*Rising*) I'll ask them.

CATELLE

Well, I could understand that curiosity if the address wasn't published; but it is; and the telephone number *isn't*. And I was interested in finding out why any one 'ud have that particular 'phone number to-day and not know the address — when it's been in all the newspapers since two o'clock this afternoon. And this call wasn't made till after five.

MRS. CRAIG

It does seem strange, doesn't it?

CATELLE

I haven't been able to figure it out.

MRS. CRAIG

But, I dare say there's some very simple explanation of it.

CATELLE

Has this telephone here been used at all, to your knowledge, Mrs. Craig, since five o'clock this afternoon?

MRS. CRAIG

Why, I *answered* a call, a few minutes ago, from Northampton, Massachusetts.

CATELLE

A long-distance call, you mean?

MRS. CRAIG

Yes. It was a Mr. Fredericks, at Smith College there, calling my niece, to inquire about her mother. Her mother is ill in Albany.

CATELLE

I see.

MRS. CRAIG

That's where we've just come from.

CATELLE

You don't know whether or not anybody from the outside has been in here since five o'clock?

MRS. CRAIG

Not to my knowledge; except a neighbor from across the avenue there, Mrs. Frazier. She brought some roses over to my husband's aunt. She was here when I got in; although I scarcely think she would have used the telephone. But, I'll ask Miss Austen if you like.

CATELLE

I wish you would, please, if you don't mind.

MRS. CRAIG (*going to the stairway landing*)

Not at all. She's up in her room I believe.

CATELLE

Would you mind asking her to step down here for a few minutes?

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, certainly. (*Calling*) Miss Austen! — Miss Austen! [*There is the sound of a door opening somewhere upstairs.*

MISS AUSTEN (*from upstairs*)

Is some one calling me?

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, — it's me, Miss Austen. Would you mind coming down here for a minute or two, Miss Austen? I'd like to speak to you.

MISS AUSTEN

All right, I'll be down in a moment.

[*Mrs. Craig turns to come down.*

MRS. CRAIG

If you will, please. She'll be right down.

CATELLE
Thank you very much.
MRS. CRAIG (*moving towards the portières*)
I suppose I'd better call the servants too, hadn't I? They'll probably know something about it.
CATELLE
Yes, I'd like to see them for a minute.
MRS. CRAIG (*going through the portières*)
I'll call them right away.
[*Catelle looks at his watch and rises.*
CATELLE (*crossing towards the portières*)
What time have you got there, Harry?
[*He watches keenly through the portières.*
MRS. CRAIG
Mazie!
HARRY
Just seven.
MAZIE (*out at the right*)
Yes, Ma'm?
MRS. CRAIG
Would you come here for a minute?
CATELLE
Do you mind if I use this 'phone here, Mrs. Craig?
MRS. CRAIG
They'll be right in.
[*She enters.*
CATELLE
Do you mind if I use this 'phone here for a minute?
MRS. CRAIG (*moving forward*)
Not at all, go right ahead. I didn't hear what you said.
CATELLE
I've got a call to make at seven o'clock.

MRS. CRAIG

That's quite all right.

[*He stands holding the telephone, and Mrs. Craig listens keenly.*

CATELLE (*into the telephone*)

Spring 4000. — Right.

[*There is a stillness: then the clock strikes seven, with a soft gong. Mazie enters, on the third gong.*

MAZIE

Did you want me, Mrs. Craig?

[*Mrs. Craig motions to her to be silent; Mazie stands looking from one to the other in a state of positive bewilderment.*

CATELLE

Thielens? Catelle. — That so? — I got away from there before six. Period? Righto, Chuck. What are you trying to do, break Harry's heart? (*He gives a rather dry little laugh*) All right, Chuck, I'll be right over. (*He hangs up and crosses to the table for his hat*) We'd better get right out there, Harry. (*Harry rises and moves up to the door*) I won't have to bother you any more right now, Mrs. Craig; there's been a bit of additional information come in over at headquarters that'll hold things up temporarily.

MRS. CRAIG (*moving towards the center table*)

Well, do you want me to have Mr. Craig get in touch with you when he comes in?

CATELLE

No, we'll get in touch with him if it's necessary.

MRS. CRAIG

And you don't want to question the rest of the people now, either?

[*Harry goes out.*

CATELLE
Not just now, Mrs. Craig, thank you very much.
[*He starts for the door.*
MRS. CRAIG
You're welcome, I'm sure. All right, Mazie.
[*Mazie withdraws reluctantly, her eyes fastened upon Catelle.*
CATELLE
I'm sorry to have had to trouble you.
MRS. CRAIG (*following him to the door*)
That's quite all right.
CATELLE (*turning at the door*)
You can explain the circumstances to Mr. Craig, if you will.
MRS. CRAIG
Yes, I will. He'll probably know something about it.
CATELLE (*going out*)
Very likely he will.
MRS. CRAIG
And if he doesn't, I'm sure one of the others will.
CATELLE
All right, thank you very much, Mrs. Craig.
MRS. CRAIG
You're very welcome, I'm sure.
CATELLE
Good evening.
MRS. CRAIG
Good evening.
[*The screen door closes, and Mrs. Craig turns slowly and lifts her closed hands in a quiet panic. Then she hurries forward and across to the window and watches the two*

*detectives going down the street. Miss Austen comes down the stairs quietly, and stands on the landing, looking at her.*

MISS AUSTEN

Did you want to see me about something, Harriet?

[*Mrs. Craig starts slightly and turns.*

MRS. CRAIG (*going out through the portières*)

No, not now, Miss Austen; it isn't necessary. I'm sorry to have troubled you. (*Miss Austen stands for a second looking after her; then she moves forward to the window, to see what it was that had so engaged Mrs. Craig's attention. Then she moves up towards the telephone, glancing through the portières.*

MISS AUSTEN (*into the telephone*)

Will you give me Clearfield, six, two, — six, two? — Please? (*She waits, glancing towards the portières and out the window*) Hello? Is this the Mowers Express Office? Well, how early could I have some things taken away to-morrow morning? Six hundred and eighty Belmont Manor. Yes, just a square from the Park. Well, eight o'clock would be time enough. Miss Irene Austen. That's right. Thank *you.* [*She hangs up, and goes up the stairs. Mrs. Craig comes through the portières, glances towards the head of the stairs, and moves to the foot of the stairs to look up. Then she steps to the telephone table and settles everything precisely. Mazie appears between the portières.*

MRS. CRAIG

What is it, Mazie?

MAZIE

Why, Mrs. Harold wants to know if she'll serve the dinner now, Mrs. Craig.

MRS. CRAIG (*moving forward, thoughtfully*)
Tell her not yet for a little while, till Mr. Craig gets here; I'm expecting him any minute.

MAZIE
Yes, Ma'm.

[*She goes out; and Mrs. Craig stands thinking hard for a second. The screen door closes sharply, and she wheels round with a rapid movement, crossing above the center table towards the door. Craig enters, removing his hat.*

MRS. CRAIG
Walter! Where have you been?

CRAIG
Out with Billy Birkmire. Why?

MRS. CRAIG (*indicating the outer door of the glass vestibule*)
Shut that door.

[*He turns and shuts it, and she moves along the foot of the stairway, glancing up and out through the portières.*

CRAIG (*coming into the room again*)
What's the matter?

[*Mrs. Craig turns and crosses back towards him.*

MRS. CRAIG
My God, haven't you seen the evening paper about Fergus Passmore and his wife!

CRAIG
Yes, I've seen it.

MRS. CRAIG
Well, what about it, Walter?

CRAIG (*putting his hat down on the piano*)
I don't know any more about it than you do, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG
My God, isn't that a terrible thing! I've been nearly out of my mind for the last half-hour. I happened to

see it in the paper there when I came downstairs, and I couldn't find you anywhere.

CRAIG

I went out with Birkmire.

MRS. CRAIG

Was that Birkmire that was here?

CRAIG

Yes, he wanted to see me about it.

MRS. CRAIG

I didn't even know whether you knew it or not; because you hadn't said anything about it when you came in this evening.

CRAIG

I didn't *know* it when I came in this evening.

MRS. CRAIG (*pointing at the paper on the table*)

It's on the very front page of the paper there.

CRAIG

I didn't see the paper this evening till Birkmire showed it to me.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, why didn't you call me then, and not go rushing out of the house?

CRAIG

I didn't want to upset you.

MRS. CRAIG (*moving forward and across in front of the center table*)

Well, I certainly couldn't have been any more upset than I have been. (*Turning to him*) Mazie said there's been a man here, and that you'd gone away with him in an automobile—so, of course, I didn't know what to think. I thought probably you'd been arrested or something. [*He looks at her sharply.*

CRAIG
What would I be arrested for?
MRS. CRAIG
Why, in connection with this thing, of course. (*Taking a step towards him*) The Police are looking for you; you know that, don't you?
CRAIG
Who says the Police are looking for me?
MRS. CRAIG
Two of them have just left here, not five minutes ago.
CRAIG
Policemen?
MRS. CRAIG
They said they were from Police Headquarters; that's all I know.
CRAIG
And what are they looking for me for?
MRS. CRAIG
Well, now, why do you suppose they're looking for you, Walter?
CRAIG
I don't know.
MRS. CRAIG
Doesn't it say in the paper there that you were seen leaving Passmore's at twelve o'clock last night?
CRAIG
It doesn't say that *I* was seen leaving there.
MRS. CRAIG
It says there was a man seen leaving there, and who else could it have been but you? You were out there, weren't you?

CRAIG
Yes.

MRS. CRAIG
Well, that's enough, isn't it?

[*She turns away to her left, and crosses above the table towards the portières.*

CRAIG
But *they* don't know that.

MRS. CRAIG
Oh, don't be absurd, Walter.

CRAIG
Who saw me?

MRS. CRAIG (*coming back towards him*)
Somebody always sees in a case of this kind.

CRAIG
Who could it have been?

MRS. CRAIG
The butler saw you, didn't he?

CRAIG
What if he did? — he didn't know me from Adam. He says so there in the paper, doesn't he?

MRS. CRAIG
He could identify your picture, couldn't he?

CRAIG
Who's going to give him my picture?

MRS. CRAIG
Don't talk so loud.

[*She steps back towards the portières, to assure herself that neither of the servants is listening.*

CRAIG (*moving forward at the left of the center table*)
Anyway, I don't believe he'd recognize my picture if he *did* see it; he only came into the library for a couple of

minutes to serve some drinks, and went right out again. And he didn't get my name, because Fergus was sitting on the lawn when I got there and took me in himself. And the butler was in bed when I left there.

MRS. CRAIG (*coming forward at the right of the table*)

Didn't any of the other servants see you?

CRAIG

Not that I know of.

MRS. CRAIG (*coming very close to him and lowering her voice*)

Didn't you tell me that Billy Birkmire called you on the telephone out there last night?

CRAIG

Yes, I talked to him out there.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, didn't the butler get your name then?

CRAIG

No; Fergus answered the 'phone himself, on the extension in the library.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, those men have been here, anyway.

CRAIG

Well, what did they want?

MRS. CRAIG

Haven't I just told you what they wanted? They wanted to see *you.*

CRAIG

Did they say they knew it was I that was out there last night?

MRS. CRAIG

I don't remember *what* they said, exactly; I was too upset. But they wanted to know where you were, and,

of course, I couldn't tell them; because you were here when I left the room, and then you suddenly disappeared. (*Turning away to the right*) I was never placed in such a position in my life. I'm sure those men must have thought I was evading them. (*Turning back to him again*) But *I* didn't know what to say to them — except that you'd probably taken a little walk around the neighborhood here; because I'd sent Mazie over to the garage to look for you as soon as I saw the paper, and she said both the cars were in there.

CRAIG

I went out in Birkmire's car.

MRS. CRAIG

Where did you go with him?

CRAIG

Over to Fergus' house.

MRS. CRAIG

And what in heaven's name did you do a thing like that for, Walter!

CRAIG

Why not?

MRS. CRAIG

Supposing you'd run into somebody out there?

CRAIG

And what if I did?

MRS. CRAIG

Do you want your name to be dragged into this thing?

CRAIG

My name 'll be dragged into it anyway, won't it?

MRS. CRAIG

Why will it?

CRAIG
You say those men have been here already.
MRS. CRAIG
And what if they have? That doesn't mean anything.
CRAIG
It means that they must have associated my name with it already, doesn't it?
MRS. CRAIG
No, it doesn't mean anything of the kind; they were simply looking for information.
CRAIG
But it was to me they *came* for that information.
MRS. CRAIG
Because you were a friend of Passmore's.
CRAIG
Exactly. And they'll very likely come back here again.
MRS. CRAIG
But, you don't have to go out looking for them, do you?
CRAIG (*turning away and going up towards the door at the left*)
You can't be playing any game in a thing like this, Harriet.
MRS. CRAIG (*following him up*)
No, and you don't have to go rushing out to meet a lot of scandalous publicity, either. I should think your own common sense would show you what it would mean to have your name even mentioned in a thing of this kind. (*Turning away and down towards the center table*) Why, it 'ud be in every newspaper in the country.
CRAIG (*coming forward at the right of the piano*)
That wouldn't bother me in the least.

MRS. CRAIG (*aghast*)

It wouldn't bother you!

CRAIG

Not the least bit — My conscience is clear.

MRS. CRAIG (*stepping to his side*)

Oh, don't be so absurdly romantic, Walter!

CRAIG

It isn't a question of romanticism at all.

MRS. CRAIG

No, and it isn't a question of conscience, either. It's simply a matter of discretion. If you've had nothing to do with this thing, what's the use of becoming involved?

CRAIG

What do you mean, *if* I've had nothing to do with it?

MRS. CRAIG (*with sudden temper*)

Oh, now don't start picking me up on every word! (*She turns away to the left and crosses above the center table towards the portières. Craig takes a cigarette from a case and closes the case with a snap. Mrs. Craig turns and sees that he is about to smoke*) Now, don't smoke in this room, Walter. (*He throws the cigarette across the room to the fireplace. Mrs. Craig looks at it in astonishment, and then at him*) Well, that's a nice place to throw it, I must say.

[*She goes down to the fireplace and picks it up.*

CRAIG (*sitting in the chair at the right of the piano*)

Oh, what does it matter!

MRS. CRAIG

Don't you want it?

CRAIG

What good is it, if I can't smoke it?

MRS. CRAIG (*crossing above the table towards the front door, holding the cigarette away from her, between her thumb and finger*)

There are plenty of other places in the house to smoke, if you want to smoke.

CRAIG

I don't know where they are.

MRS. CRAIG (*going out the door*)

You can smoke in your den, can't you?

CRAIG

If I shut the door. (*He sits thinking, deeply. The screen door slams, and Mrs. Craig comes in again, looking keenly towards the portières*) Did those men say when they'd be back here?

MRS. CRAIG

I don't remember whether they did or not; — I suppose they did. They said they'd get in touch with you if it was necessary. (*Coming forward to his side, and lowering her voice*) But, if they *do* come back here, Walter, don't give them any more information than I did.

CRAIG

Well, I certainly won't deny that I was a friend of Fergus'.

MRS. CRAIG

You don't have to deny that you were a friend of his; but you certainly don't have to submit to a lot of cross-examination by detectives, either, simply because you happened to be a friend of his. (*She turns away and moves to the front of the center table*) Let them go and cross-examine some of his other friends; you weren't the only friend he had.

CRAIG

Why did you submit to their cross-examination?

MRS. CRAIG (*turning to him*)

Because I didn't know at the time to what extent they were justified in questioning me. I thought probably they had some information about your having been out at Passmore's last night. And I was at my wit's end, trying to keep from saying something that would imply an admission of it. I told them right away that I'd just gotten in from Albany, so I suppose they assumed that I didn't know where you'd been last night.

CRAIG

How long did they stay here?

MRS. CRAIG

About fifteen minutes, I imagine; but it seemed like a year.

CRAIG

What were they talking about all that time?

MRS. CRAIG

About you, and Fergus Passmore, and where you were, and when you'd be back, and all kinds of questions. [*She goes to the piano and picks up his hat, settling the piano scarf.*

CRAIG

Did they say they'd been to any other of Fergus' friends?

MRS. CRAIG

I don't remember, they may have. They said something about him being very well known here socially, so they probably have.

[*Craig thinks for a second, then rises abruptly and crosses below the center table and up to the telephone.*

CRAIG

I think I'll call Birkmire up and see if they've been to see him.

MRS. CRAIG (*with a panicky movement towards him*)

Now, wait a minute, Walter! (*She puts his hat on the table as she crosses above it*) You're not going to do anything of the kind.

CRAIG

Why not?

MRS. CRAIG (*taking the telephone from him*)

Now, go away from this 'phone. (*She draws him forward by the arm, away from the telephone*) Let me tell you something.

CRAIG

What's the matter?

MRS. CRAIG

Don't you realize that that telephone is being watched — and that they are probably watching Birkmire's too?

CRAIG

Who is?

MRS. CRAIG

Why, the Police, of course. Haven't you any realization of your position in this affair?

CRAIG

I evidently haven't the same realization that you have.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, it's time you did have.

CRAIG

It is?

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, it is.

CRAIG

And what realization have you of my position?

MRS. CRAIG

Never mind what realization I have; that doesn't matter now. I simply know that the very first thing the Police do in a case of this kind is to watch the telephone calls to and from the house.

CRAIG

Not from this house.

MRS. CRAIG

I mean from Fergus' house.

CRAIG

I wasn't going to call Fergus' house.

MRS. CRAIG

You were going to call Billy Birkmire, weren't you?

CRAIG

At his own house, yes.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, what difference does it make, Walter. Do you think those detectives can't put two and two together? Birkmire called you last night at Passmore's, didn't he?

CRAIG

Yes.

MRS. CRAIG

And there's undoubtedly a record of the call.

CRAIG

That wouldn't involve my name, would it?

MRS. CRAIG

It would if the operator listened in.

CRAIG

And do you think she has nothing to do but listen in on calls?

MRS. CRAIG

She listened in on this one, didn't she?

CRAIG

On which one?

MRS. CRAIG

What? (*She steps back from him suddenly, and touches her hair, in an effort to appear casual*) What did you say?

CRAIG

Which call do you say the operator listened in on?

MRS. CRAIG

I don't know which one she listened in on. But some one must have listened in on something or those men wouldn't have come here, would they?

CRAIG

Did they say the operator had reported on a call from here?

MRS. CRAIG

I don't remember what they said, distinctly. One of them kept rambling something about a telephone call, but I assumed it was the one that Birkmire made to you last night out at Fergus'.

CRAIG

Didn't they say when the call was made?

MRS. CRAIG

What does it matter when it was made, Walter?

CRAIG

It matters a lot.

MRS. CRAIG

The fact remains, doesn't it, that that telephone is undoubtedly being watched *now*.

CRAIG (*whirling round and picking up the telephone again*)

Well, I want to know *why* it's being watched.

MRS. CRAIG (*springing to his side and seizing the telephone*) Now, listen to me, Walter Craig; you *must* not use that telephone. (*She looks him straight in the eyes, then moves back several steps and looks at him defiantly*) I will not allow you to drag my name into a notorious scandal.

CRAIG (*whipping the receiver off and putting it to his ear*) I've got to find out where I'm at in this thing!

MRS. CRAIG (*raising her voice threateningly*) If you speak over that telephone I'll leave this house! (*He takes the receiver from his ear and looks at her steadily. There is a pause*) And you know what construction 'ud be put upon that, under the circumstances.

[*He slowly hangs up and sets the telephone back onto the little table, holding her eyes steadily. Then he moves slowly towards her.*

CRAIG

What do you mean, you'll leave this house?

MRS. CRAIG (*stonily*) I mean exactly what I said. Do you think I could stay in this neighborhood twenty-four hours after my name had been associated with a thing of this kind?

CRAIG

And haven't you any appreciation of the necessity of my knowing what's happening in this case?

MRS. CRAIG

I have no appreciation of any necessity except the necessity of keeping still.

CRAIG

But supposing something developed that would reveal absolutely the fact that I had been out there last night —

MRS. CRAIG

What *can* develop, if you keep still?

CRAIG

But, supposing something did? Wouldn't it be very much better for me to have been open and aboveboard from the beginning, instead of having played a waiting game, and probably create an attitude of suspicion where there are no grounds for any?

MRS. CRAIG

There *are* grounds for suspicion, Walter; don't evade the issue.

CRAIG

What are they?

MRS. CRAIG

The fact that you were out there last night.

CRAIG

That doesn't mean a thing.

MRS. CRAIG

Evidently not, to you.

CRAIG

Does it to you?

MRS. CRAIG

What does it matter what it means to me? It isn't for me to determine the degree of your guilt or innocence. I'm not interested.

CRAIG

You're not interested!

MRS. CRAIG

I'm interested only in the impression on the popular mind, —and the respect of the community we've got to live in.

CRAIG

You mean you'd rather know I was involved in this thing and *keep* the respect of the community, than know I was a victim of circumstances, and lose it?

[*Mrs. Harold appears between the portières. Mrs. Craig sees her over Craig's shoulder, and crosses quickly below him.*

MRS. CRAIG

What is it, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD

I'm sorry to bother you, Mrs. Craig, but I'm afraid the dinner'll be spoiled.

MRS. CRAIG (*going down to the mirror*)

All right, Mrs. Harold, put it up; I'll be right out.

[*Craig moves forward to the upper right-hand corner of the center table.*

MRS. HAROLD (*withdrawing*)

All right.

CRAIG

Mrs. Harold.

MRS. HAROLD (*stopping*)

Yes, sir?

[*She comes back a few steps towards him.*

CRAIG

Mrs. Harold, do you know if anybody has called that number that I gave you last night here, to-day, on this telephone?

MRS. HAROLD

You mean the number you gave me to have Mr. Birkmire call you at?

CRAIG

Yes, Levering three one hundred.

MRS. HAROLD

No, sir, I don't know that anybody has. I only gave it to Mr. Birkmire over the telephone last night when he called.

CRAIG

*You* haven't had occasion to call that number to-day on this telephone, have you, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD

No, sir, I haven't, Mr. Craig.

CRAIG

All right, Mrs. Harold, thanks very much.

[*She starts to go, then stops and turns again.*

MRS. HAROLD

I never even thought about it to-day until Mrs. Craig asked me for it when she came in this evening.

[*There is a pause. Craig shifts his eyes to his wife, who raises her arm slowly and touches her hair before the mirror.*

CRAIG

All right, Mrs. Harold, thank you very much. (*Mrs. Harold withdraws, and Craig moves up slowly towards the portières and watches her out of hearing distance. Then he turns and looks at his wife. She stands very still. He moves a step or two slowly towards her*) It was you that made that call. (*She turns and looks at him, with a touch of defiance*) What were you doing, checking up on me?

MRS. CRAIG (*starting up towards the portières*)

Don't flatter yourself, Walter.

CRAIG

That's what you were doing, wasn't it?

MRS. CRAIG

Don't flatter yourself. The man hasn't been born yet that I'd bother checking up on.

CRAIG

Why didn't you tell the truth?

MRS. CRAIG (*whirling upon him*)
Because I anticipated an attack of your romantic conscience.

CRAIG
You were playing safe; that was it, wasn't it?

MRS. CRAIG
Exactly!

CRAIG
And at my expense!

MRS. CRAIG
I knew the necessity of it with you!

CRAIG (*turning away to the left, crossing in front of the center table*)
God!

MRS. CRAIG (*following him up*)
I knew if I told you I made that call, you'd be on the telephone in five minutes telling the Police.

CRAIG (*turning sharply*)
I intended doing that anyway.

MRS. CRAIG
You silly fool!

CRAIG
That's where I went this evening, with Birkmire, when I left here — to Police Headquarters.

MRS. CRAIG (*aghast*)
Oh!

CRAIG
And the only reason I didn't tell them then was that the man in charge of the case had gone to his dinner and wouldn't be back till eight o'clock. But he'll be told *then!*

[*He swings up to the front door.*

MRS. CRAIG (*leaning across the center table, and speaking threateningly*)

Well, if you do, you'll explain my leaving you, too.

CRAIG

That wouldn't worry me in the least, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, it might worry *them*.

[*He turns sharply and looks at her, dismayed.*

CRAIG (*coming back to the table*)

Listen to me, Harriet. Why weren't you at least *honest* with me in this thing, and not try to make it appear that *I* was responsible for the visit of those detectives?

MRS. CRAIG

Because I knew exactly what you'd do if I told you. And that would mean an explanation of why I had called up; and the next thing would be an admission of the fact that you are the man the Police are looking for.

CRAIG

But it's *you* those detectives are looking for.

MRS. CRAIG

Oh, you needn't try to turn it on to me! They wouldn't be looking for either of us if you'd stayed at home last night, instead of being out card-playing with a lot of irregular people.

[*She turns down to the mirror.*

CRAIG

What was there irregular about Fergus Passmore?

MRS. CRAIG (*turning to him, in a wrath*)

There must have been some irregularity, or this thing wouldn't have happened. Everybody that knew Fergus Passmore knew that he was insanely jealous of his wife;

and then *you* have to go out visiting them. (*She crosses below the table to the piano*) I felt in my bones up there in Albany that something 'ud happen while I was away; that was the reason I didn't stay up there any longer than I absolutely had to. I knew as soon as ever my back was turned you'd be out with your friends again. [*He looks at her, under his brows; and there is a pause.*

CRAIG

And what has your back being turned got to do with my visiting my friends?

MRS. CRAIG

Never mind what it has to do with it; only you wouldn't have *been* visiting them if I'd been here.

CRAIG

How would you have stopped me?

MRS. CRAIG

I'd have stopped you all right, one way or another.

CRAIG

What would you have done — locked the door on me?

MRS. CRAIG

It wouldn't have been necessary to lock the door on you. (*Turning and looking at him directly*) You haven't *been* visiting them in the last eighteen months, have you?

CRAIG

No, I haven't.

MRS. CRAIG

And they haven't been visiting you, either?

CRAIG

No, they haven't.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning away*)

Well —

CRAIG (*after a slight pause*)

You mean you've kept them out of here?

MRS. CRAIG (*turning to him again and looking him straight in the eyes*)

Well, if I did the end justified the means; you at least haven't been in the shadow of the law in the last eighteen months.

[*He holds her eye for a second, then moves forward to the front of the table.*

CRAIG

You're certainly running true to form, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, I'm glad of it if I am.

CRAIG

My aunt said here a while ago that you'd driven all my friends away from this house.

MRS. CRAIG (*with level significance*)

There are ways of getting rid of people without driving them away from the house.

[*Craig makes a little sound of bitter amusement.*

CRAIG

And I thought she was imagining things at your expense.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you see she probably had better perception than you'd given her credit for.

[*He turns and looks at her darkly.*

CRAIG

Probably she had; for she perceived something else, Harriet, that may be equally true.

MRS. CRAIG

Is that so?

CRAIG

She said you were trying to get rid of me too — (*She darts a look at him*) without actually driving me away from the house. (*She laughs derisively, and moves across towards the portières. He follows her up, raising his voice*) And I believe that's true, too.

MRS. CRAIG

Keep your voice down! Do you want everybody in the house to hear you?

CRAIG

You've admitted it, by your attitude in this affair this evening.

MRS. CRAIG (*looking at him, and moving forward to the mantelpiece*)

I don't know what you're talking about.

CRAIG (*coming forward and leaning on the table*)

Very well, you know what I'm talking about. And you knew what my aunt was going to talk about too, here a while ago; that's the reason you left the room before she started.

MRS. CRAIG

I'm sorry I didn't stay here now.

CRAIG

No danger of your staying here, Harriet; you couldn't bear it. (*She laughs, and he moves forward to the left*) My God, how perfectly she knows you, Harriet! She couldn't have read you any better if you'd written it out for her. And I felt rather sorry listening to her, thinking she was probably getting a little old and suspicious; particularly when she said you had excluded my friends.

MRS. CRAIG

Do you think I wanted my house turned into a tavern?

CRAIG

My friends never turned my mother's house into a tavern.

MRS. CRAIG

They didn't play poker at your mother's house till all hours of the morning.

CRAIG

Every Thursday night for ten years; till two o'clock, if they felt like it.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, evidently, your mother and I had very different ideas of a house.

CRAIG

Very different indeed, Harriet; there was more actual home in one room of my mother's house than there'd be in all of this if we lived in it a thousand years.

MRS. CRAIG

Why didn't you stay in it, then, if you found it so attractive?

CRAIG

Now you're talking, Harriet; why didn't I do *just that.* (*He turns away to the left, then turns suddenly back*) But, don't make any mistake that I think you didn't want my friends here simply because they played cards; you wouldn't have wanted them if they'd come here to hold prayer meetings. You didn't want them because, as my aunt says, their visits implied an importance to *me* that was at variance with your little campaign — the campaign that was to reduce me to one of those wife-ridden sheep that's afraid to buy a necktie for fear his wife might not approve of it.

[*He goes up towards the front door.*

MRS. CRAIG

Oh, don't try to make yourself out a martyr; you've had your share of this bargain.

[*He turns suddenly and looks at her, then comes forward again to the front of the table.*

CRAIG

I never regarded this thing as a bargain.

MRS. CRAIG

Did you expect me to go into a thing as important as marriage with my eyes shut?

CRAIG

I wanted you to go into it honestly, as I went into it — fifty-fifty — And you've been playing safe right from the start.

[*He turns away towards the piano.*

MRS. CRAIG

I've been doing nothing of the kind.

CRAIG

Don't tell me what you've been doing; I see your game as clearly as my aunt sees it. (*He turns and comes back towards her*) You've been *exploiting me*, consistently, in your shifty little business of personal safety. And you'd throw me right now to the suspicion of implication in this double murder — to preserve that safety.

[*He goes back towards the piano again.*

MRS. CRAIG (*almost crying*)

I've been trying to preserve my home.

CRAIG

That's all I've heard from you since the day I married you.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, what else has a woman like me *but* her home?

CRAIG (*turning to her*)

Hasn't she her husband?

MRS. CRAIG

She could lose her husband, couldn't she? — As many another woman has.

CRAIG

Couldn't she lose her home too?

MRS. CRAIG

She couldn't if she knew how to secure it.

CRAIG (*raising his finger solemnly*)

That's the point in a nutshell, Harriet; if she knew how to *fix* it for herself.

[*He turns away and rests his hands on the piano.*

MRS. CRAIG

Well, what if I have fixed things for myself? You haven't lost anything by it, have you? If I've fixed them for myself I've fixed them for you too. Your home is here. And maybe if I hadn't played the game so consistently it wouldn't *be* here. And I wouldn't be the first woman that's lost her home, and her husband too, through letting the control of them get out of her hands. (*She moves up towards the back of the room, in a crying temper*) I saw what happened to my own mother, and I made up my mind it 'ud never happen to me. (*She turns and comes forward again*) She was one of those "I will follow thee, my husband" women — that believed everything my father told her; and all the time he was mortgaging her home over her head for another woman. And when she found it out, she did the only thing that women like her *can* do, and that was to die of a broken heart — within six months; and leave the door open for the other woman to come in as stepmother over

Estelle and me. (*She turns to the mantelpiece*) And then get rid of us both as soon as Estelle was marriageable. (*Turning to him suddenly*) But the house was never mortgaged over *her* head, I'll promise you that; for she saw to it that it was put in her name before ever she took him; and she kept it there, too, right to the finish.

[*She sweeps up towards the back of the room again.*

CRAIG

Why didn't you ask me to put this house in *your* name?

MRS. CRAIG (*whirling upon him*)

Because I didn't *want* it in my name!

CRAIG

It would have been more honest.

MRS. CRAIG (*coming forward to the right end of the table*)

I haven't done anything that wasn't honest!

CRAIG

How would you know, Harriet?

MRS. CRAIG

I've simply tried to be practical; but, with your usual romanticism, you want to make me appear like a criminal for it.

CRAIG

I'm not reproaching you at all.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you shouldn't reproach me; for there's nothing to reproach me about.

CRAIG

You simply married the wrong man, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG (*witheringly*)

I married a romantic fool! (*He looks at her narrowly, and she holds his eye*) *That's* what I married; (*she turns*

*away and goes up to the portières to look out*) and I'm seeing it more every day I live.

[*There is a pause. Then Craig breaks into a hard little laugh.*

CRAIG

How well we understand each other now, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG (*coming forward to the mantelpiece again*)

Well, I understand you, anyway, whether you understand me or not. (*Speaking directly to him*) And you ought to thank your God that I do, for I don't know what 'ud become of you if I didn't.

[*She turns to the mantelpiece, and suddenly sees the card that Mazie left back of the center ornament. She picks up the little envelope deftly, takes the card out and reads it. Craig regards her icily; and after a pause, he speaks — in a level, rather dangerous tone.*

CRAIG

The brass of you — and the presumption.

[*She looks at him.*

MRS. CRAIG

What?

CRAIG

I'm just wondering how you *get* that way.

MRS. CRAIG

How I get what way?

CRAIG

So brazenly presumptuous, as to say such a thing to me.

MRS. CRAIG

What have I said? I don't know what you're talking about.

CRAIG (*moving slowly away a step or two from the piano*)

What have you ever done, or a million others like you,

that would warrant the assumption of such superiority over the men you're married to?

MRS. CRAIG

Nobody's assuming any superiority.

CRAIG

Doesn't your remark admit it?

MRS. CRAIG (*turning and moving up to the portières*)

Don't get yourself into a temper.

CRAIG

That you don't know what 'ud become of me only that *you* understand me.

MRS. CRAIG (*glancing through the portières*)

Neither I do.

CRAIG

The presumption of you.

MRS. CRAIG

What are you standing there for, Mazie?

MAZIE AND CRAIG (*speaking together*)

MAZIE: Why, Mrs. Harold sent me in to see if you were coming in to dinner.

CRAIG: That you should set yourself about to control the very destiny of a man, —

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, I'm coming right away.

MRS. CRAIG AND CRAIG (*speaking together*)

MRS. CRAIG: But I want to see you for a minute first, Mazie.

CRAIG: As though I were some mental incompetent.

MAZIE

Yes, Ma'm.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning and going towards Craig, lowering her voice, and trying to silence him with a gesture*)

Don't make a show of yourself in front of Mazie. (*Mazie comes through the portières, and Mrs. Craig turns to her*) Mazie, what is this card here?

MAZIE

Why, it's the Society card, Mrs. Craig, of the Mutual Benevolent.

MRS. CRAIG

And what is it doing here?

MAZIE

Why, Christine sent it down about an hour ago, with the tailor's little boy, to know if I'd pay her dues for her.

MRS. CRAIG

And couldn't you find any place for it but back of that ornament?

MAZIE

Why, I was —

MRS. CRAIG

After all the times I've told you never to put anything on that mantelpiece.

MAZIE

Yes, you *have* told me, Mrs. Craig, but when I came in —

MRS. CRAIG

Then, why do you do it? Must I keep telling you the same thing indefinitely? You know perfectly well I never allow anybody even to *dust* that mantelpiece but myself. I even bought a special little brush for those ornaments, because I wouldn't trust them to anybody else. And yet the minute you get my back turned you must use them as a catchall for everything in the house.

MAZIE

Mrs. Harold asked me something when I came in, and —

MRS. CRAIG

I am not interested in what anybody asked you; that does not excuse you. (*Mazie takes a handkerchief from the pocket of her apron and touches it to her eyes*) I have told you over and over again *never* to put anything back of those ornaments; and you deliberately disobey me. You simply will *not* do as you are told. And when a girl will not do as she is told, the best thing for her to do is to go some place where she will be *made* to do it. So I want you to get your things together to-night and leave this house to-morrow morning. (*Mazie looks at her, then turns away to leave the room*) Here's the card. And find some place for it besides back of an ornament. (*Mazie takes the card and withdraws*) And tell Mrs. Harold to put up the dinner, I'll be down in two minutes; (*She starts for the stairs*) I'm going up to see what my niece wants for *her* dinner. (*She goes up the stairs haughtily. Halfway up she turns, but without stopping, and addresses Craig coldly*) You'd better go out there and get your dinner, before it's cold.

[*She disappears at the head of the stairs, and Craig stands looking at the floor. His eyes wander up the stairs after her, and then down the right side of the room. They settle upon the ornament on the mantelpiece, and he looks at it hard; then crosses slowly and picks it up. He holds it in his hand, looking at it curiously: then suddenly lifts it in the air and smashes it on the bricks in front of the mantelpiece. He stands looking at the shattered pieces for a moment; then takes a cigarette from his case and strolls back across the room towards the piano. He taps the cigarette on the case, then takes out a match and lights it, tossing the burned match on to the floor. Then he*

*leans against the piano and smokes, thoughtfully. Mrs. Harold hurries in through the portières.*

MRS. HAROLD

Did something get broke in here, Mr. Craig? (*He indicates the shattered ornament with a nod, and Mrs. Harold looks towards the mantelpiece. She sees the pieces of the shattered ornament, and raising her hands and eyes to Heaven, takes a step or two towards them*) Glory be to God this day and this night, how did that happen, Mr. Craig! Did it fall off the mantelpiece?

CRAIG (*without moving*)

No, I smashed it, Mrs. Harold.

MRS. HAROLD (*puzzled*)

On purpose, do you mean, Mr. Craig?

CRAIG

Yes. — I didn't like it.

MRS. HAROLD

I wish you'd tell Mrs. Craig it was you that done it, Mr. Craig; if she sees it she might think it was one of us that broke it.

CRAIG

I'll tell her all about it, Mrs. Harold; don't you worry about that.

[*He straightens up and starts across slowly towards the big chair in front of the mantelpiece, and Mrs. Harold moves a step or two towards the portières.*

MRS. HAROLD (*turning to him*)

Will I get the dustpan and sweep that up, Mr. Craig?

CRAIG

No, don't bother about it now, Mrs. Harold; go out and get your dinner.

[*She moves towards the portières, then stops again.*

MRS. HAROLD
Ain't you comin' to your dinner, Mr. Craig?
CRAIG (*sitting down*)
No, I don't want any dinner to-night, Mrs. Harold.
MRS. HAROLD
Don't you want nothing at all?
CRAIG
Not a thing.
[*She withdraws; and he sits smoking and thinking.*
MRS. CRAIG (*from the head of the stairs*)
Are you down there, Walter?
CRAIG
Yes.
MRS. CRAIG
Listen — did something *fall* down there a minute ago?
CRAIG
No.
MRS. CRAIG
Are you sure?
CRAIG
Yes, I'm sure.
MRS. CRAIG
Well, it sounded up here as though the house fell down.
CRAIG (*after a slight pause*)
Maybe it did, Harriet — I'm just sitting here wondering.
[*He sits smoking. His gaze wanders up, and out, and away off.*

THE CURTAIN DESCENDS SLOWLY

## ACT III

SCENE: *Same as preceding act — the following morning, about eight-thirty. Craig is still sitting in the big chair before the fireplace, asleep. After a pause, Mrs. Harold enters through the portières, carrying a dustpan and hand brush. She sees Craig, looks at him curiously, and also observes the pieces of the shattered ornament and the cigarette butts at his feet. She turns and puts the dustpan and brush down on the seat at the right of the stairway, and, with a glance up the stairs, crosses and unlocks the front door and goes out. The screen door slams after her and Craig wakes. He looks around, glances at his watch, gets up and settles himself before the mirror. Mrs. Harold tiptoes in, bringing the morning paper.*

CRAIG

Good morning, Mrs. Harold.

MRS. HAROLD (*stopping above the center table*)

Good morning, Mr. Craig.

CRAIG

I must have made a night of it sitting here.

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, I was wondering if you'd been there all night.

CRAIG

I must have fallen asleep.

MRS. HAROLD

You must feel pretty tired, don't you?

CRAIG (*turning to her*)

No, I'm all right. Is that the morning paper you have there, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, sir, I was just bringing it in.

CRAIG

Let me see it, will you?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, sir. (*He takes the paper; and, stepping to the window, forward, reads it eagerly*) Would you like a cup of coffee, Mr. Craig?

CRAIG

Yes, I'll take a little coffee if you have it.

MRS. HAROLD (*starting for the portières*)

It's all made; — I'll just turn on the percolator for a minute.

[*She goes out; and he stands reading. There is the sound of a door opening somewhere upstairs. He glances towards the head of the stairs, then crosses quickly up to the front door and out on to the porch. Mrs. Harold comes in again; and, picking up the dustpan and brush, comes forward to the mantelpiece and starts to sweep up the ornament and cigarette butts. Mrs. Craig appears on the stairway.*

MRS. CRAIG

Mrs. Harold.

MRS. HAROLD (*straightening up*)

Yes, Ma'm?

MRS. CRAIG

Has the morning paper come yet?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm, I just gave it to Mr. Craig; he's reading it there on the front porch.

MRS. CRAIG (*puzzled, and coming down the stairs*)
What is *he* doing up so early?

MRS. HAROLD
I don't think he's been in bed at all, Mrs. Craig; he was sitting in this big chair here when I came in this morning, and he was sitting here last night when I locked up.

[*Mrs. Craig crosses to the bay window at the left and looks out on to the porch; and Mrs. Harold resumes her sweeping. Mrs. Craig becomes aware of what Mrs. Harold is doing, and turns to her.*

MRS. CRAIG
What is that you're sweeping up there, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD (*straightening up*)
Why, it's that center ornament that was here, Mrs. Craig.

[*Mrs. Craig crosses down in front of the center table, looking wide-eyed at the vacant place on the mantelpiece.*

MRS. CRAIG
What!

MRS. HAROLD
It got broke last night.

MRS. CRAIG
Oh, my God, Mrs. Harold, don't tell me that that's that beautiful statuette!

MRS. HAROLD
Mr. Craig said that he broke it.

MRS. CRAIG (*looking at the shattered pieces in the dustpan, which Mrs. Harold is holding*)
Oh, my God, look at the way it's broken! — It's smashed into a thousand pieces.

MRS. HAROLD
It must have fallen on the bricks here.

MRS. CRAIG

Oh, that never simply fell, Mrs. Harold; it's absolutely shattered — look at the size of the pieces. It's out of the question even to think of having it mended.

MRS. HAROLD

No, I don't think it could ever be mended now.

MRS. CRAIG (*almost crying*)

That beautiful thing — that I wouldn't even allow anybody to go near; and look at it now.

MRS. HAROLD

It certainly is too bad.

MRS. CRAIG

And, of course, I might just as well throw those others away now, for they're absolutely meaningless without this one.

[*She turns away, in a pang of grief, and moves a few steps towards the left, then suddenly turns again to Mrs. Harold*) How on earth did it ever happen, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD

I don't know, I'm sure, Mrs. Craig.

MRS. CRAIG

I suppose Mazie broke it for spite, didn't she? — Because I reprimanded her last night for putting things back of it.

MRS. HAROLD

No, she didn't break it, Mrs. Craig, for she was out there in the kitchen with me when we heard it fall.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning away and crossing below the center table*) Well, send her in here to me now, I want to speak to her.

MRS. HAROLD

Mr. Craig said that *he* broke it; (*Mrs. Craig turns and looks at her*) he said he didn't like that ornament.

MRS. CRAIG
Tell Mazie I want to see her.
MRS. HAROLD
She isn't here, Mrs. Craig; she's gone.
MRS. CRAIG
You mean she's left already?
MRS. HAROLD
Yes, Ma'm, she left right after she had her breakfast.
MRS. CRAIG
Of course she did, the contemptible little devil.
MRS. HAROLD
Mr. Craig said that he'd tell you all about it.
MRS. CRAIG
Where did Mazie go?
MRS. HAROLD
She said she was goin' to her married sister's for a while.
MRS. CRAIG
Did you pay her her wages?
MRS. HAROLD
Yes, Ma'm, I paid her last night.
MRS. CRAIG (*turning away towards the front door*)
All right, Mrs. Harold. (*Mrs. Harold goes out through the portières, taking the dustpan and brush with her*) Walter, come in here for a minute, will you? (*She glances over her shoulder, to see that Mrs. Harold is out of earshot, then turns and waits till Craig comes in. He enters, carrying the newspaper*) What does the paper say this morning about the Passmore thing?
CRAIG (*handing her the newspaper*)
You're quite safe.
[*He comes forward and across in front of the center table to the mirror, and straightens his tie.*

MRS. CRAIG (*stepping forward to the piano and spreading the paper out eagerly*)
What does it say?

CRAIG
His brother got in last night from Pittsburgh, with a letter that Fergus had written him, intimating his intentions.

MRS. CRAIG
Then, Fergus did it himself?

CRAIG
So it appears.

MRS. CRAIG
I always told you he was jealous of his wife.
[*Craig turns and looks at her.*

CRAIG
He did it because she was dishonest.

MRS. CRAIG (*reading*)
I suppose this telegram here from his brother about Fergus' letter was the additional information that that detective spoke about here last night. (*She straightens up and speaks directly to Craig*) He called Police Headquarters from here about seven o'clock, and then he said it wouldn't be necessary to bother us any more for a while, — that there'd been some additional information come in on the case: so I suppose that's what it was; for it says here the telegram was received at Police Headquarters at six forty-five.

CRAIG (*moving with a wearied air towards the portières*)
What does it matter now, Harriet?

MRS. CRAIG
It doesn't matter *now*, but it would have mattered — only that I kept my head last night, and didn't allow

you to telephone, and make a show of us all. (*He laughs bitterly*) You can laugh, as much as you like; but you can thank me that your name isn't in every paper in the city this morning.

[*She resumes her reading.*

CRAIG

Oh, I can thank you for more than that, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you can thank me for that, anyway.

CRAIG

I can thank you for having given me a new name last night — that fits me so perfectly that I've decided to continue its use. You called me a romantic fool.

MRS. CRAIG

Fergus must have known about this man that Adelaide's been going around with; for it says here he'd mentioned him once before in a letter to his brother.

[*Mrs. Harold appears between the portières.*

MRS. HAROLD

The coffee's ready, Mr. Craig.

CRAIG (*turning quietly towards the portières*)

All right, Mrs. Harold.

[*She withdraws, and he follows her. Mrs. Craig looks up suddenly and crosses towards him.*

MRS. CRAIG

Listen, Walter, come here for a minute.

[*He turns.*

CRAIG

What?

MRS. CRAIG

Listen. (*She glances over his shoulder after Mrs. Harold, then lowers her voice*) Billy Birkmire 'ull very likely

want you to go out there with him to Fergus' funeral; but don't you do it. And you'd better tell him not to go around there either; for one of you is apt to say something. And if that butler out there sees *you*, he might recognize you. And there's no use starting anything now, when the thing's all over.

[*He looks at her steadily.*

CRAIG

Is that all you wanted to tell me?

MRS. CRAIG

Well, it's the thing to do, isn't it? It certainly wouldn't help matters *now* to say anything, would it? What are you smiling at?

CRAIG

At your wanting to help matters.

MRS. CRAIG

So I *have* wanted to help them.

CRAIG

Since when?

MRS. CRAIG (*turning away to the center table*)

Well, don't let's go into all that again. I've been wanting to help *you* principally, but you don't seem to have sense enough to appreciate it.

CRAIG

Is that all you want me for?

MRS. CRAIG (*turning to him again*)

No, it isn't all I want you for. I want to know about that ornament there that was broken here last night.

CRAIG

What about it?

MRS. CRAIG

I don't know *what* about it; that's the reason I'm asking

you. Mrs. Harold tells me here this morning that you told her last night that you'd broken it.

CRAIG

So I did.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you ought to be proud of yourself.

CRAIG

I was for a moment.

MRS. CRAIG

What were you doing — leaning against the mantelpiece again as usual?

CRAIG

No, it wasn't an accident; I did it deliberately.

MRS. CRAIG

What do you mean, you did it deliberately?

CRAIG

I mean that I smashed it purposely.

MRS. CRAIG

What for?

CRAIG

I became suddenly heroic.

MRS. CRAIG

I don't believe you.

CRAIG (*turning away*)

Very well, that's that.

MRS. CRAIG

Why would you deliberately break a beautiful, expensive ornament like that?

CRAIG (*turning back*)

I didn't break it.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you said you did.

CRAIG (*bitterly*)

I said I smashed it — into a thousand little pieces, right here on these bricks here. And then I smoked one cigarette after another, till I had your sanctum sanctorum here absolutely littered with ashes and cigarette butts. I was positively a hell of a fellow around here for about an hour last night; you should have seen me.

MRS. CRAIG

What did you do, go out of your mind or something?

CRAIG

No, I was particularly clear in my mind, strange to say. You made a remark here last night, Harriet, that completely illuminated me; and illuminated you. And suddenly I saw — for the first time — everything — just as one sees an entire landscape at midnight in a flash of lightning. But, unfortunately, the lightning struck my house — and knocked it down; and I sat here all night wondering how I might build it up again.

MRS. CRAIG

What remark are you talking about?

CRAIG

You said that a woman might lose her husband but not her home, if she knew how to secure it.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, hasn't many a woman lost her husband?

CRAIG

And many a man has lost his life too, Harriet, because his wife has never made a sufficiently illuminating remark. But you did make it. And that other remark — when you said there were ways of getting rid of people without driving them away from the house. (*He*

*smiles bitterly*) I saw your entire plan of life, Harriet, and its relationship to me. And my instinct of self-preservation suggested the need of immediate action — the inauguration of a new régime here: so I smashed the little ornament there — as a kind of opening gun. And I was going to smash all the other little ornaments — and Gods you had set up in the temple here, and been worshipping before me. I was going to put my house in order, including my wife; and rule it with a rod of iron. (*Mrs. Craig turns away, faintly amused*) I don't wonder that amuses you; it amused me; particularly when I suddenly remembered the truth of what you called me last night; and in view of that, the absurdity of my trying to sustain such a rôle indefinitely. It made me laugh — But I'm rather sorry you couldn't have seen me, anyway; I think you would at least have appreciated the sincerity of my *attempt* to continue here as your husband.

[*He turns slowly and moves towards the portières.*

MRS. CRAIG

What do you mean, your attempt to continue here as my husband?

CRAIG

The rôle is not *for* me, Harriet; I can only play a romantic part.

[*She turns her head quietly and looks at him; and he holds her eye for a second, then goes out through the portières; and she stands looking after him. Then she moves slowly to the portières and stands, thinking. The doorbell rings, but evidently she doesn't hear it. She moves forward slowly, still thinking narrowly. Mrs. Harold comes through the portières hurriedly.*

MRS. CRAIG

There's some one at the door, Mrs. Harold.

[*The doorbell rings again.*

MRS. HAROLD (*hurrying across to answer the door*)

I guess maybe it's the man for Miss Austen's things.

MRS. CRAIG

Is Miss Austen leaving already?

MRS. HAROLD (*stopping near the door*)

I think so; she said last night she was going first thing in the morning.

MRS. CRAIG

Is she up?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm, she asked me to call her at seven.

[*She goes out, and Mrs. Craig crosses after her.*

MRS. CRAIG

Well, if that's the man for her things, Mrs. Harold, have him go round to the side door and bring her things down the back stairway; I don't want him dragging trunks down these front stairs.

[*She steps to the bay window at the left and looks out at the expressman.*

EXPRESSMAN (*at the front door*)

Trunks ready?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, they're ready. Would you mind going around to the side door; you can bring them down the back way.

EXPRESSMAN

Around this way?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, up the steps; I'll open it for you.

[*The screen door slams, and she hurries in again, crossing towards the portières.*

MRS. CRAIG

Are Miss Austen's things ready, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm, I helped her pack last night.

MRS. CRAIG

Did she say where she was going?

MRS. HAROLD (*stopping*)

Yes, Ma'm; she sez she's going to the Ritz-Carlton Hotel now, but after that she sez she's going to travel. (*Continuing to the portières*) I must open the door for that man.

[*She goes out, and Mrs. Craig stands looking after her, thinking. She moves across towards the portières and stops again, looking out through the portières. Ethel hurries down the stairs, with her hat and coat on.*

MRS. CRAIG

Ethel, dear child, what are you doing up so early?

ETHEL

I haven't been asleep all night. I've been waiting to hear some one else up.

MRS. CRAIG

You're not ill, are you, dear?

ETHEL

No, but I must go home immediately, Aunt Harriet; I'm too troubled in my mind to stay here any longer.

MRS. CRAIG

But you can't go immediately, dear.

ETHEL

I must go, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

But there's no train, dear, until the nine-seventeen.

ETHEL

Well, it's nearly that now, isn't it?

[*Mrs. Craig looks at her watch.*

MRS. CRAIG

It isn't a quarter of nine yet.

ETHEL

Well, it'll take that time to get to the station, won't it?

MRS. CRAIG

It doesn't take ten minutes, dear, in a taxicab; and I can have one here in five minutes.

ETHEL (*putting her bag on the table and crossing down to the mirror*)

Well, will you call one, please?

MRS. CRAIG (*moving after her*)

Certainly, dear; but there's no use calling it already, you'd only have to wait around the station there.

ETHEL

I'm so worried, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

I know, dear child; but I'm sure you're upsetting yourself unnecessarily; we certainly would have heard something if anything had happened.

ETHEL (*turning to Mrs. Craig*)

I really should call Mr. Fredericks on the long distance, Aunt Harriet; he'll be wondering what on earth is the matter. Because I rushed away as soon as ever I got Dr. Wood's wire, and simply left a note that Mother was very ill. And he's probably called me up at home by this time and found that I'm down here; and he won't know what to think of it.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, I wouldn't worry myself too much about what he'll think, dear.

ETHEL

But he'll think it's funny that I should be down here if Mother's so ill.

[*There is a sound upstairs of a trunk being moved.*

MRS. CRAIG (*dashing towards the stairs and up on to the landing*)

He probably hasn't given it a thought.

ETHEL (*moving across above the table and looking out the bay window*)

Oh, don't say that, Aunt Harriet, I know he has.

[*Mrs. Craig claps her hands briskly, to attract the expressman's attention.*

MRS. CRAIG

Please be careful of that floor there, Mr. Expressman, will you?

EXPRESSMAN

This baby got away from me. I thought it was lighter than it is.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, please try to keep it away from that wall there; I don't want that wall all scratched up; I only had it painted in April. (*There is a sound of the trunk being dragged along the hallway to the back stairs, and then a heavy thud. Mrs. Craig closes her eyes in an agony of suffering and leans heavily upon the banister to keep from fainting. Then she turns and comes down into the room again*) Mr. Craig's aunt is sending some luggage away to be mended; and those expressmen are so careless they don't care if they tear down the house.

ETHEL

I haven't had a chance to speak to Miss Austen yet.

MRS. CRAIG

I suppose she's getting dressed.

ETHEL

I haven't seen Uncle Walter yet, either.

MRS. CRAIG

He's out there having some coffee, I believe. Don't you want to come out and have some too, dear?

ETHEL

I don't think I could touch a thing, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

You could take a sip of coffee.

ETHEL

I don't want Uncle Walter to see me looking so terrible.

MRS. CRAIG

What does it matter, darling; he understands the circumstances. And you really shouldn't start on that trip back home without something. And when you do go back, Ethel, I want you to consider seriously what I've been saying to you about Mr. Fredericks. You're not married to him yet; and if there's anything to be done, it's now that it must be done. You can't come back and undo a thing like marriage.

ETHEL

Oh, I don't know what to do, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, there's no hurry about doing anything just now. And don't let him hurry you. Just think it over — for his sake as well as for your own. You don't want to be a burden to him, do you?

ETHEL

Certainly not.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, what else would you be to him, dear — unless you used your own money? And that isn't conducive to respect for a man. And, in any case, you'd find in time that he'd come to resent your independence of him.

MISS AUSTEN (*at the head of the stairs*)

Yes, I have it here in my bag, Mrs. Harold.

MRS. CRAIG (*drawing Ethel towards the portières*)

So just think it over. And come on out to the breakfast room and let me get you something.

[*They go out through the portières. Miss Austen comes down the stairs, dressed for the street. She glances through the portières and picks up the telephone.*

MISS AUSTEN (*into the telephone*)

Will you give me Market, three, three, three, three, please? Please. (*Mrs. Harold comes down the stairs, dressed for the street, and carrying a suit case and a smaller bag*) I think you might as well take those right out on to the porch, Mrs. Harold.

MRS. HAROLD (*going out*)

Yes, Ma'm.

MISS AUSTEN

Have them ready when the cab comes. (*Into the telephone*) Hello. — Will you please send a taxicab to six hundred and eighty Belmont Manor, right away, please? Yes. (*She sets the telephone down and Mrs. Harold comes in*) It'll be here in a few minutes, Mrs. Harold. Are you all ready?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm, I'm ready.

MISS AUSTEN
Hadn't you better speak to Mrs. Craig about your keys, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD
I left them with yours up on her dressing table.

MISS AUSTEN
I think you'd better tell her, Mrs. Harold.

MRS. HAROLD
Do you want me to tell them *you're* going?

MISS AUSTEN (*going towards the door*)
No, it isn't necessary, Mrs. Harold; I'll write to Mr. Craig. But, I think you'd better tell them that *you're* going.

MRS. HAROLD
I did tell Mr. Craig I was going; I told him this morning.

MISS AUSTEN
Well, I think you'd better tell Mrs. Craig, also.

MRS. HAROLD
Yes, Ma'm.

MISS AUSTEN
There might be something she'd want to ask you.

MRS. HAROLD
All right, I'll tell her.

MISS AUSTEN
I'll sit here on the porch till the taxi comes.
[*She goes out, and Mrs. Harold goes to the mirror and straightens her funny hat.*

MRS. CRAIG (*coming through the adjoining room*)
Are you in there, Mrs. Harold? (*Mrs. Harold moves up to the foot of the stairs and stands facing the portières. Mrs. Craig comes in*) Oh, I've been looking for you

out there, Mrs. Harold; I wanted you to give my niece a little breakfast.

MRS. HAROLD

I've left everything ready out there, Mrs. Craig.

MRS. CRAIG

Where are you going, Mrs. Harold?

MRS. HAROLD

Why, I'm going with Miss Austen, Mrs. Craig.

MRS. CRAIG

Indeed?

MRS. HAROLD

She was tellin' me last night she was goin' to leave here, and I said I thought I'd be leavin' pretty soon myself; so she said if I was goin' anyway soon, she'd like very much to have me go with her.

MRS. CRAIG

And where are you going with her?

MRS. HAROLD

Why, we are goin' to the Ritz-Carlton first, and after that she sez she's goin' to travel for a few years.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, that ought to be a very good experience for you.

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, I've never been many places outside of here and Long Branch, and I thought I'd better take the chance while I had it.

MRS. CRAIG

And do you think it's very considerate of you, Mrs. Harold, to walk away this way without giving me any notice?

MRS. HAROLD

You didn't give Mazie much notice last night, Mrs. Craig.

MRS. CRAIG

Mazie didn't deserve any notice; she was a very disobedient girl. She absolutely refused to do what I told her.

MRS. HAROLD

Well, I haven't always done exactly what you told me to do, either, Mrs. Craig, — so maybe I deserve to go as well as Mazie.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, of course, you can suit yourself about going, Mrs. Harold, but you understand I shall have to tell Miss Hewlitt about your leaving without notice.

MRS. HAROLD

Miss Hewlitt knows all about my leaving, Mrs. Craig; she's surprised that I didn't leave long ago, to tell you the truth.

MRS. CRAIG

And why didn't you leave?

MRS. HAROLD

Well — there were no children — and it's near church. But Miss Hewlitt told me when I came here that if I stayed a month I'd be the first out of seven that did.

MRS. CRAIG

Miss Hewlitt has sent some very unsatisfactory women here.

MRS. HAROLD

A lot of them have worked in some pretty fine places.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning away, and moving down to the mirror*)

Well, of course, that depends upon what a person's idea of a fine place is. And I suppose the next *batch* she sends me won't be any more satisfactory than the rest.

MRS. HAROLD

I think you're very foolish to have her send any more, Mrs. Craig, if you ask me.

MRS. CRAIG

One person can't do everything.

MRS. HAROLD

I've heard you say yourself more than once that you had to do over again everything that any woman that ever worked for you did, — so why not save the money?

[*Mrs. Craig turns from the mirror and comes towards her.*

MRS. CRAIG

What about the keys?

MRS. HAROLD

I left them all on your dressin' table upstairs; and Miss Austen's, too.

MRS. CRAIG

Wasn't there anything else to be left?

MRS. HAROLD

Yes, Ma'm, I left the money that I had over with the week's list in an envelope with the keys.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning to the portières*)

All right. — I hope you enjoy your world tour.

MRS. HAROLD (*going towards the front door*)

It'll be a change, anyway.

[*Mrs. Craig turns at the portières.*

MRS. CRAIG

And I hope when you come back, you'll be able to find a place that'll be as easy as this one has been.

MRS. HAROLD (*stopping at the door and turning*)

Don't worry about me, Mrs. Craig; nobody belongin' to me ever died in the poorhouse.

[*She goes out on to the porch, and Mrs. Craig looks after*

*her stonily. The front doorbell rings incisively, and Mrs. Craig steps forward at the right and looks keenly towards the front door.*

FREDERICKS (*at the front door*)

How do you do?

MRS. HAROLD

How do you do?

FREDERICKS

I should like to see Miss Landreth, if I could. My name is Fredericks.

[*Mrs. Craig makes a rapid movement of consternation, then looks at the portières. Ethel comes through the portières.*

ETHEL AND MRS. HAROLD (*speaking together*)

ETHEL: I think I'd better get my things, Aunt Harriet; it must be nearly nine o'clock.

MRS. HAROLD: Oh, come in, please. I think Miss Landreth is just having her breakfast.

[*The screen door slams.*

ETHEL AND FREDERICKS (*speaking together*)

ETHEL: Would you mind telephoning for a taxicab?

FREDERICKS: I suppose I am a bit early.

[*Ethel hears his voice and stops at the foot of the stairs. Mrs. Craig glides out through the portières. Mrs. Harold comes in at the front door.*

MRS. HAROLD

Oh, I was just comin' to call you, Miss Landreth; there's a Mr. Fredericks here to see you.

[*He comes in.*

FREDERICKS

Hello, Ethel.

[*Mrs. Harold passes to the door, back of him, and goes out again.*

ETHEL

Gene, there isn't anything happened to Mother?

FREDERICKS

Not a thing in the world, dear, that I know of.

ETHEL

You're sure?

FREDERICKS

'Pon my word, Ethel. I haven't been to your house.

ETHEL

Well, why did you come away down here, then, at this hour of the morning?

FREDERICKS (*taking a step to her*)

I wanted to see *you*. (*She begins to cry, and he takes her in his arms*) I thought maybe you were ill or something. Don't cry, darling; I give you my word there isn't a thing wrong at home. I simply telephoned you as soon as I got your note, and they told me you'd left for here: so then I called you on the long distance. But I couldn't get any satisfaction on the long distance, and I didn't know what to think. So I just jumped on the night train and got in here at eight-twenty.

ETHEL (*straightening up and touching her hair*)

I'm going back right away, Gene; there's a train at nine-seventeen from the station down town.

FREDERICKS

I'll go back with you.

ETHEL

I don't know why I ever came away in the first place.

FREDERICKS (*guiding her to the chair at the right of the piano*)

Sit down here for a minute, dear; you look terribly pale. [*He puts his hat on the piano.*

ETHEL
I haven't closed my eyes since I've been here, I've been so worried.

FREDERICKS
I've been worried about *you*, too, ever since I got your note.

ETHEL
And then I told Aunt Harriet about our engagement, and that upset me more than ever.

FREDERICKS
Why?

ETHEL
Oh, she didn't seem to approve of it exactly.

FREDERICKS
Why not?

ETHEL (*rising*)
Oh, for several reasons, Gene, — I'll tell you on the train.

[*She starts for the foot of the stairs.*

FREDERICKS (*taking her hand as she passes him*)
I wish you'd tell me now, Ethel.

ETHEL (*turning to him*)
There isn't time, dear.

FREDERICKS
But you make me uneasy.

ETHEL
It's nothing, Gene, particularly. She simply said she thought perhaps I hadn't considered the thing sufficiently.

FREDERICKS
What is there to consider, darling, in a thing of this kind — except that we love each other.

ETHEL

But she said a thing like marriage should be considered more practically.

FREDERICKS

I don't accept that argument, Ethel; I've seen too many carefully reasoned marriages turn out badly. It's simply a chance that one has to take, more or less. And I have a good way of getting along.

ETHEL

As a single man, yes.

FREDERICKS

And even as a married man.

ETHEL

You don't know that yet, Gene, whether you have or not.

FREDERICKS

But other fellows marry, darling, and get along, on a great deal less salary than I'm getting.

ETHEL

I know that, Gene; but, as Aunt Harriet says, their wives are not living the way I've been accustomed to living. Not that I'd mind that in the least, dear; only I wouldn't want you to feel that I was making any sacrifices. And she says you might feel that in your present circumstances.

FREDERICKS

But haven't you any faith in my ability to improve those circumstances?

ETHEL

Of course; but I wouldn't want to be a burden to you in the meantime.

FREDERICKS

But you're the kind of burden I need, Ethel. You

know I've had three promotions since I've known you.

ETHEL

Yes, I know you have.

FREDERICKS

Well, I attribute it to nothing but the incentive that the thought of marrying you has given me. I've worked like a dog these past two years, with just that in mind; and if it were removed, — well, I just don't think beyond that, that's all.

[*He turns away to the left a few steps and stands looking straight out. She crosses and lays her hand on his arm.*

ETHEL

I hadn't thought of not marrying you, Gene; I was just thinking whether or not it would be wise to postpone it.

FREDERICKS (*turning to her*)

It *wouldn't* be wise, Ethel; it isn't a good thing to postpone a thing like marriage — so many things can happen. (*He suddenly takes her in his arms*) And I don't want anything to happen.

ETHEL

What else have I got, Gene, if anything happened to Mother?

[*She buries her face in his shoulder and cries hard.*

FREDERICKS

Nothing's going to happen to her, sweetheart. And if it did, you wouldn't feel any worse than I'd feel if anything happened to this.

[*She continues to cry for a second, then straightens up and presses her handkerchief to her eyes.*

ETHEL

We'd better go, Gene, it must be nearly nine o'clock.

[*She starts across below the table towards the mirror, and Fredericks starts across above the table towards the telephone. Craig comes through the portières.*

FREDERICKS

I'd better call a taxi, hadn't I?

ETHEL

Oh, Uncle Walter, — this is Mr. Fredericks.

[*Fredericks continues over to shake hands with Craig, and Ethel moves up to Fredericks' left.*

CRAIG (*shaking hands*)

I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Fredericks.

FREDERICKS

How do you do, Mr. Craig?

ETHEL

Mr. Fredericks is the young man I'm engaged to be married to.

CRAIG

Well, I *am* glad to meet you.

FREDERICKS

Pretty lucky fellow, don't you think, Mr. Craig?

CRAIG

I'd say you were. And is it all set?

FREDERICKS

I hope so; although Ethel seems to feel a little nervous about it.

CRAIG

What are you nervous about, Ethel?

ETHEL

I'm not nervous — it isn't that. But I was telling Gene that I'd been discussing it with Aunt Harriet, and she seemed to think that probably I hadn't considered it enough.

[*Fredericks looks at Craig.*

CRAIG

What did she want you to consider?

ETHEL

Well, she said on account of my age she didn't think I appreciated the practical side of marriage enough.

CRAIG

That's the one side of marriage that should not be appreciated too much, Ethel; it's a lack of faith in each other.

FREDERICKS

That's what I tell Ethel.

CRAIG

The only thing I think you need to consider really seriously — is whether or not you are both absolutely honest with each other. (*Fredericks looks at Ethel, and Craig crosses below them towards the stairs*) It doesn't seem to me that there's very much else to worry about.

ETHEL

We're going back on that nine-seventeen, Uncle Walter; do you know the number of the taxicab company?

CRAIG (*starting up the stairs*)

You won't need a taxi, I'm going right down past the station.

ETHEL

Are you going now?

CRAIG

Right away, yes. I'll get my hat. You have plenty of time; I can get you down there in less than ten minutes.

ETHEL

Uncle Walter, will you bring my satchel down when you're coming?

CRAIG

Yes, I'll get it.

ETHEL

It's on the chair there, right inside my door. (*Picking up her bag from the table and crossing down to the mirror to fix herself*) We won't have to call a taxi.

[*Fredericks glances out through the portières, then comes forward, lowering his voice.*

FREDERICKS

Did your aunt tell you I called you last night?

[*Ethel turns and looks at him.*

ETHEL

On the long distance, you mean?

FREDERICKS

Yes, I called you from Northampton as soon as I got your note. I called you at home first, of course, and they gave me this address.

ETHEL

And you called here?

FREDERICKS

Yes, about seven o'clock. Didn't she tell you?

ETHEL

No, she didn't, Gene.

FREDERICKS

I talked to her. She said you were asleep.

ETHEL

I couldn't have been asleep, Gene.

FREDERICKS

I asked her to call you to the telephone, but she didn't seem to want to do it. She said you'd just gotten in and you were tired out.

ETHEL

Well, I *was* tired, but she could have called me; she might have known I'd want to talk to you. Because I didn't know what you'd think of my being down here, after leaving word that I was going home.

FREDERICKS

Have you seen her this morning?

ETHEL

Yes, but she didn't say anything about it. And I was talking to her here this morning about you, too. I was saying that I ought to call *you* on the long distance, that you'd be wondering what was the matter.

CRAIG (*hurrying down the stairs with Ethel's satchel*)

I'll run over and get the car.

FREDERICKS

Can I take that, Mr. Craig?

CRAIG

I'll leave it out here on the porch. I'll be back in two minutes. You have lots of time.

FREDERICKS (*going to the piano for his hat*)

Are you ready, Ethel?

ETHEL

Yes, I'm ready, Gene. I'd better say good-by to Aunt Harriet.

FREDERICKS

Will I wait for you outside?

ETHEL

Don't you want to meet her, Gene?

FREDERICKS

I don't think she wants to meet me, Ethel.

ETHEL

Why not?

FREDERICKS
After what you've been telling me.
ETHEL
Oh, that's nothing, Gene.
FREDERICKS
She hung up on me last night.
ETHEL
Yes, I want to ask her about that call.
FREDERICKS (*going out*)
I think I'd better wait for you outside.
[*Ethel glances through the portières, then comes forward thoughtfully at the right. There is a slight pause. Then Mrs. Craig glides through the portières and across to the bay window to look out. Ethel watches her narrowly, then moves to the right end of the center table.*
ETHEL
I'm just going, Aunt Harriet.
[*Mrs. Craig turns, slightly startled.*
MRS. CRAIG
Oh, I thought you'd gone. (*She comes back towards Ethel*) I didn't hear anybody in here, and I was wondering if you'd gone without telling me.
ETHEL
No, I'm just going.
MRS. CRAIG
Where are Mr. Craig and Mr. Fredericks?
ETHEL
Mr. Fredericks is there on the porch. (*Mrs. Craig turns to the front door and glances out*) Uncle Walter's gone over to get the car.
MRS. CRAIG
Oh, he's going to drive you in.

ETHEL

Yes.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, that'll be fine, — you won't have to bother calling a taxi. (*Coming forward to Ethel again*) Did Mr. Fredericks have any word about your mother?

ETHEL

No, he hadn't been home.

MRS. CRAIG

Why don't you call him in, Ethel; I should like to meet him.

ETHEL

He thought probably you wouldn't care to meet him.

MRS. CRAIG

Why, how absurd. Why not?

ETHEL

I was telling him about what you said last night, when I told you I was going to marry him.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, my dear child, I was simply talking in a general way. My remarks weren't directed against Mr. Fredericks particularly. I'm sure he'd appreciate the logic of what I said himself.

ETHEL

He doesn't, Aunt Harriet; I told him what you said, and he takes quite the opposite view.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, of course, he has considerable to gain by the transaction, Ethel, you must remember that.

ETHEL

Well, Uncle Walter has nothing to gain by it, and he agrees with him.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you remember I told you last night that Mr. Craig was extremely romantic.

ETHEL (*becoming very stony*)

Why didn't you call me last night, Aunt Harriet, when Mr. Fredericks telephoned?

MRS. CRAIG

Because you were asleep, dear.

ETHEL

I couldn't have been asleep. I haven't closed my eyes since I've been here.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, I thought you were asleep, Ethel; I sent Mazie up to your room and she said your door was closed.

ETHEL

Well, she could have rapped.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, what was the sense of upsetting you, dear?

ETHEL

Because it was important to me.

MRS. CRAIG

I asked him if it was important, and if there was any message he wanted to leave, and he said no.

ETHEL

And you hung up on him.

MRS. CRAIG

Because he insisted upon talking to you; and you were not in any condition to be talked to.

[*She turns and moves towards the bay window.*

ETHEL

Why didn't you tell me this morning that he'd called — when I said I should call him?

MRS. CRAIG (*turning coldly*)

Now, please, Ethel dear — I shan't answer any more questions about Mr. Fredericks. (*She goes to the bay window to look out*) I've had quite enough to worry me this morning without thinking about Mr. Fredericks. He's going back with you, I suppose?

ETHEL (*crossing up to the front door*)

Yes.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning to her*)

Well, I'm glad you won't have to make the trip alone. Good-by, dear. (*She kisses her*) I hope you'll let me know right away how you find your mother.

ETHEL (*holding her hand*)

Aunt Harriet —

MRS. CRAIG

What, dear?

ETHEL (*after a pause, and holding her eye*)

Aunt Harriet, is Uncle Walter *leaving* you?

MRS. CRAIG

Why, what on earth ever put that into your head, Ethel?

ETHEL

Something he was saying when I came to the head of the stairs to come down this morning.

MRS. CRAIG

And what was he saying?

ETHEL

Something about your having made a remark that made it impossible for him to continue here as your husband.

MRS. CRAIG

I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about, Ethel.

ETHEL

And then a while ago here, when I told him I was going to be married to Mr. Fredericks, he said the only thing we needed to consider seriously was whether or not we were absolutely honest with each other. And I was wondering if he'd found out.

MRS. CRAIG

Found out what?

ETHEL

That that you told me last night, — when I said I didn't think it was honest.

[*There is a movement on the front porch. The screen door slams, and Mrs. Craig turns away quickly and looks out the bay window.*

CRAIG (*outside*)

All set?

FREDERICKS (*outside*)

All set. Ethel's inside.

ETHEL (*going out*)

Good-by, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning and following her to the door*)

Good-by, dear.

ETHEL

I'll write you as soon as I get home.

MRS. CRAIG

Do, dear; let me know how your mother is.

ETHEL

Yes, I shall.

[*The screen door slams.*

CRAIG

Ready, Ethel?

ETHEL

Yes, I'm coming, Uncle Walter.

[*Mrs. Craig turns nervously and moves across and down to the mantelpiece.*

CRAIG

Your satchel's in the car. I'll be with you in a minute.

[*He comes in, taking a little leather key case from his pocket, and crosses to the portières.*

MRS. CRAIG

Are you going to the office now?

CRAIG

Yes, it's nearly nine o'clock.

[*He goes through the portières, and Mrs. Craig moves up to the portières.*

MRS. CRAIG

Mrs. Harold says you haven't been in bed all night; you won't feel much like sitting at a desk all day.

CRAIG (*from the other room*)

I'll have plenty of time to rest after a bit.

[*Mrs. Craig's eyes narrow, in an attempt to fathom this remark. She comes forward again at the right, slowly and thoughtfully. Craig enters, fastening the little key case, and crosses towards the front door, picking up his hat from the table as he passes.*

MRS. CRAIG

Did you find what you were looking for?

CRAIG

I wasn't looking for anything — I was just leaving the key to your car and the garage, with some other things I've left there for you. (*He turns at the door*) If you should want me for anything during the next week or two, Harriet, I'll be at the Ritz.

[*She turns suddenly and makes a rapid movement to the center table.*

MRS. CRAIG

Now, listen to me, Walter Craig, you're surely not serious about leaving this house.

CRAIG

Why, I should think that decision would please you very much.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, it doesn't please me at all; it's absolutely ridiculous.

CRAIG

But it's so absolutely practical.

MRS. CRAIG

Oh, don't try to be funny.

CRAIG

And you've been deploring my lack of practicality so long.

MRS. CRAIG

I'd like to know what's practical about a man walking out and leaving his wife and his home.

CRAIG

I have no wife to leave, — for you neither loved nor honored me.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you married me, whether I did or not.

CRAIG

I never saw you before in my life, Harriet — until last night.

MRS. CRAIG

You married me, didn't you?

CRAIG

And you married a house; and if it's agreeable to you, I'll see that you have it; and that you can go on having it, just as though I were here.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning away towards the mantelpiece*)
You'll be here; unless I'm very much mistaken.

CRAIG
You don't know your man, Harriet.

MRS. CRAIG
I know him well enough for that, anyway.

CRAIG
Oh, you knew me pretty well, I'll grant you that; particularly when you said my mind worked very slowly.

MRS. CRAIG
It's working pretty slowly now, when you don't appreciate the absurdity of a move of this kind.

CRAIG
But you failed to reckon with the thoroughness of my mind, Harriet, when it *does* work. And it appreciates this situation so thoroughly that it has no illusions about the impossibility of my continuance here.

MRS. CRAIG
What is there so impossible about it?

CRAIG
We've shown our hands, Harriet, and the game is up.

MRS. CRAIG
What did I do last night that was so terrible?

CRAIG
You simply showed your hand, that was all.

MRS. CRAIG
I simply kept you from making a fool of yourself; that was all I did.

CRAIG
But you also showed me how I could keep from making a fool of myself in the future.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, you're certainly not beginning very auspiciously, I can tell you that.

CRAIG

But I shall be at least a self-respecting fool; and that's something I could never be if I stayed here. There's something in a man, Harriet, that I suppose is his essential manhood; and you insulted that last night. And I should be too embarrassed here, under your eye, knowing that you had no respect for that manhood. I should remember my lover's ardors and enthusiasms for our future; and you bearing with me contemptuously, for the sake of *your* future. I couldn't stand it.

MRS. CRAIG

You're not telling the truth; I always respected you; and I never had anything but respect for your plans, either.

CRAIG

Don't try to soften the blow, Harriet; I assure you it isn't necessary.

[*He turns towards the door, and she makes a move towards him.*

MRS. CRAIG

Where are you going when you leave here?

[*He turns and looks at her.*

CRAIG

That 'ud be rather interesting to know, Harriet — where a lot like me are going. — Out of fashion, possibly.

MRS. CRAIG

Well, what about your things? — Aren't you going to take anything with you?

CRAIG

You may send them to me if you like.

MRS. CRAIG (*turning away*)

Well, I won't send them to you; for you'll very likely be back again within a week.

CRAIG

Perhaps it will be just as well if you don't send them to me, Harriet, — for I'm rather sentimental about things; and I might look back, and be turned into a romantic fool.

MRS. CRAIG

Oh, I suppose you'll never forgive me for calling you that.

CRAIG

No, there isn't a thing in the world I don't forgive you for, Harriet; that's the reason it won't be necessary for me to come back here any more; there's nothing to adjust. I guess possibly I'm just a bit of an old-fashioned man — I must be trusted — and you never trusted me.

MRS. CRAIG

I wouldn't trust any man after what I've seen.

CRAIG

I don't blame you. But I wonder that, with all your wisdom, it never occurred to you that one cannot play a dishonest game indefinitely.

MRS. CRAIG

I haven't played any dishonest game.

CRAIG

Possibly not, according to your standards; but I think you have. And I think you know you have. And that's the rock that you and I are splitting on, Harriet.

If this affair at Passmores' hadn't revealed you, something else would: so my going may as well be to-day as to-morrow. Good-by, Harriet.

[*He goes out; she leans on the table. The screen door slams. She moves over to the bay window and watches him get into the automobile: then she comes forward to the window at the right and watches him down the street. After he has passed beyond her vision, her gaze wanders into the room again, and she becomes conscious of two tiny pieces of the broken ornament near the mantelpiece. She stoops and picks them up, flicking away with her foot any other invisible particles that may be about. Then she looks at the two remaining ornaments on the mantelpiece and tries to come to some conclusion about their arrangement. She places them equi-distant from each other and the ends of the mantelpiece, and stands off to observe the effect. The front doorbell rings sharply. She turns and crosses to answer it.*

BOY'S VOICE (*at the front door*)

Telegram for Mrs. Walter Craig.

[*She signs for the telegram, the screen door slams and she comes in, opening the telegram. She reads the telegram, looks straight ahead for a second, thinking — looks at the wire again, and bursts into tears — sinking into the chair at the right of the piano. She cries hard for a moment, then smooths the telegram out and reads it again. Mrs. Frazier appears in the door, dressed in gray, and carrying an armload of white roses. She comes forward inquiringly.*

MRS. FRAZIER

Good morning, Mrs. Craig. (*Mrs. Craig doesn't hear her*) Good morning. (*Mrs. Craig looks at her, startled,*

*gets up nervously and moves across to the front of the center table, touching her eyes and her hair*) I do hope you'll pardon my walking in without ringing, but I thought Miss Austen 'ud be on the front porch, and I wanted to bring her these roses. (*She hands Mrs. Craig the roses*) I was telling her yesterday I'd bring her over some; she was saying she admired white roses so much; and I have so many of them over there just now.

MRS. CRAIG

I haven't seen her yet this morning.

MRS. FRAZIER (*preparing to go*)

Well, if you'll just tell her I left them.

MRS. CRAIG

Yes, I shall; thanks ever so much.

MRS. FRAZIER (*turning back*)

Oh, have you had any word about your sister this morning, Mrs. Craig? Miss Austen was telling me yesterday she was quite ill.

MRS. CRAIG (*starting to cry again*)

She died this morning at six o'clock.

MRS. FRAZIER

Oh, dear me, how sad.

MRS. CRAIG

I just had this wire.

MRS. FRAZIER

Dear, dear, dear, isn't that too bad!

MRS. CRAIG

I had no idea she was so ill or I should never have come back.

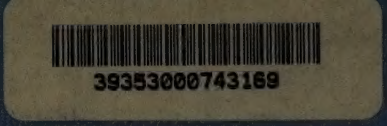
MRS. FRAZIER

Dear, dear, dear, I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have bothered you at all.

MRS. CRAIG
That's quite all right.
MRS. FRAZIER
I'm sure you have my sympathy.
MRS. CRAIG
Thank you.
MRS. FRAZIER
I do hope you'll let me know, Mrs. Craig, if there's any way I can be of any service to you.
MRS. CRAIG
Thank you very much; I don't think there's anything anybody can do.
MRS. FRAZIER
I suppose you'll have to go right back up there again, won't you?
MRS. CRAIG
I don't know whether I shall be able to or not, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Frazier; it's been such a strain.
MRS. FRAZIER
Yes, those long illnesses are dreadful. But I hope you won't hesitate to let me know if there's anything I can do.
MRS. CRAIG
That's very kind of you. I'll give these roses to Miss Austen when I see her.
MRS. FRAZIER
If you will, please. (*She starts for the door*) I'm terribly sorry. I'll run over again.
[*She goes out; and Mrs. Craig stands very still until she hears the screen door close. Then she steps up to the door and clicks the latch. Then she turns, comes forward a few steps into the room again, and stands, holding the roses*

*against her bosom and looking straight out. A clock out in one of the adjoining rooms strikes nine with a mournful gong. After the fourth gong her eyes wander in the direction of the clock and she moves slowly across towards the portières. Then she comes forward at the right, wandering, and crosses below the table to the piano. Several rose petals flutter to the floor. She stands at the piano for a moment, looking out through the bay window, then retraces her steps. She looks unseeingly at the scattered petals, continues up towards the portières, looks out through the deserted rooms, and finally stops. A few more petals drift to the floor. The curtain commences to descend, very, very slowly. She turns desolately and wanders back towards the piano again, clutching the roses close, her eyes wide and despairing.*

THE END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